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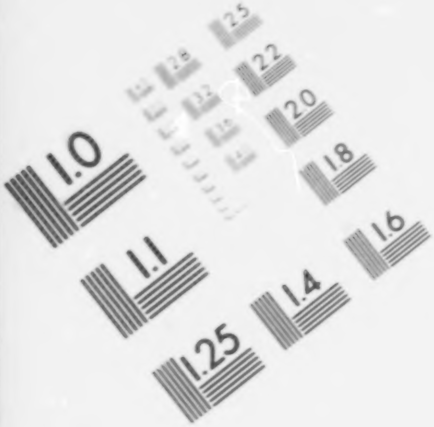

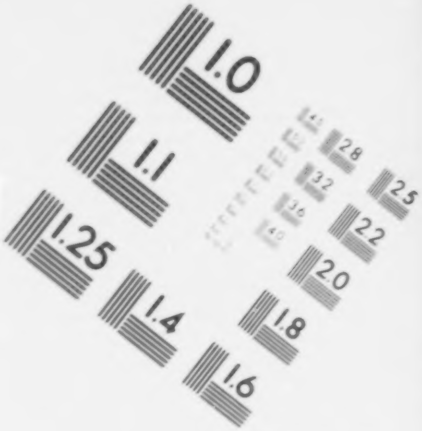

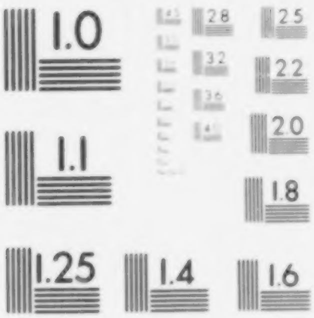

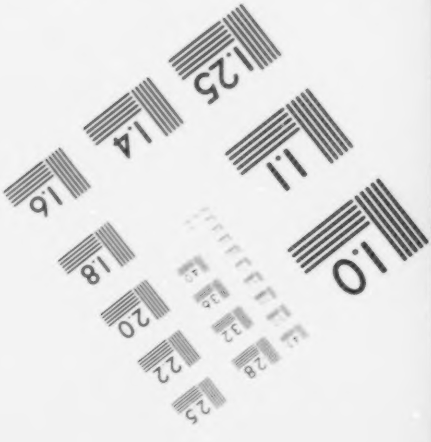

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DOCUMENT RESUME

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ABSTRACT

This report examines the process of school reform in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) during the last half of the 1995-96 school year. It focuses on the progress of the Children Achieving initiative in the first 6 of the projected 22 clusters and considers 11 schools in these 6 clusters in detail. The focus of work in this first year of operation was to develop standards, put the infrastructure in place that would support reform, establish the relationships needed to make the infrastructure work, begin preparing teachers to use the new standards, and design and win support for an accountability system and incentives. The standards and incentives embedded into this accountability system will come into play in the future as "drivers" of the next stages of reform. Observation, review of documents, and interviews provided data that show that Children Achieving was on schedule and gaining momentum in spite of fiscal and political challenges. The vision supporting the reform was less well understood at the school level than at the central and cluster offices. Key organizational components of the reform were gaining acceptance, although understanding and support varied across the schools. The schools that made the most progress shared the characteristics of a collective vision, formal structures to support the program, collaborative decision making, and an atmosphere of trust and interdependence. (Contains four tables and one figure.) (SLD)

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Prepared by

Consortium for Policy
Research in Education

Research for Action

OMG Center for Collaborative Learning

for
the Children Achieving Challenge

UD 031 534

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Children Achieving Challenge

About the Children Achieving Challenge

CPRE

About the Consortium for Policy Research in Education

Consortium for Policy Research in Education

Table of Contents

I. Introduction 1

II. Activities of the Evaluation Team 8

III. *Children Achieving*: The Theory of Action 19

IV. The Context of *Children Achieving* 29

V. The Progress of Reform 40

VI. Building Capacity for Instructional Reform 56

VII. The Family Resource Network 68

VIII. Benefits of *Children Achieving* and Factors Affecting the Pace of Reform 77

IX. Summary of Findings and Questions for Future Research 92

Appendices are included in a separate volume.

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I. Introduction

The Children Achieving Challenge

The Children Achieving Challenge, established in 1995, provides technical assistance and resource support to the School District of Philadelphia and its partners. Created through a grant from the Annenberg Foundation and matching support from other public and private funders, the Challenge will invest more than $150 million over a five-year period in a wide range of comprehensive school reforms in Philadelphia. The Challenge takes its name from Philadelphia's *Children Achieving* education reform plan and the Annenberg Challenge Grant received by Philadelphia in February 1995.

No American city as large and diverse as Philadelphia has succeeded in having the majority of its young people achieve at high levels. Philadelphia set out to be the first major city in the nation to meet this challenge. In 1994, David W. Hornbeck was recruited as Philadelphia's Superintendent of Schools to help lead the effort. Upon his arrival, task forces of educators, community leaders and parents were formed and mapped out a broad plan. They called it *Children Achieving*. The final plan was adopted by the Philadelphia Board of Education in February, 1995. It set forth ten broad goals:

1. Set high expectations for everyone by adopting new standards of performance.
2. Design accurate performance indicators to hold everyone accountable for results.
3. Shrink the centralized bureaucracy and let schools make more decisions.
4. Provide intensive, sustained professional development for all staff.
5. Make sure all students are healthy and ready for school.
6. Create access to the community services and supports students need to succeed in school.
7. Provide up-to-date technology and instructional materials.
8. Engage the public in shaping, understanding, supporting and participating in school reform.
9. Insure adequate resources and use them effectively.
10. Address all these priorities together and for the long term, starting now.

At the same time as the action plan for *Children Achieving* was nearing completion, the Annenberg Foundation offered a handful of America's trouble cities the opportunity to vie for significant resources to restructure their public school systems. Philadelphia submitted its plan. As a result, the Annenberg Foundation designated Philadelphia as one of a small number of American cities to receive a five-year, $50 million Annenberg Challenge grant to improve public education and support implementation of *Children Achieving*. Among the conditions for receiving the grant was a requirement to produce two matching dollars for each one received from Annenberg, and to create a management structure other than the School District to provide program, fiscal and evaluation oversight of the grant.

To meet these conditions, the District turned to the business community. Greater Philadelphia First (GPF) houses the Challenge and provides oversight to it through the GPF Partnership for Reform. GPF is a not-for-profit association of the region's largest employers, providing leadership on issues important to the economic development and quality of life in the community. The Partnership for Reform is composed of representatives from the GPF board, community organizations, the School District, and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT).

In any city the size of Philadelphia, there are hundreds of agencies, organization, corporations, foundations that along with the School District, work to improve the schools. Such organizations usually focus on specific areas or projects but are often unable to do much to improve the school system as a whole. The question addressed by the Challenge is how to focus these fragmented efforts. During its five-year tenure, the Challenge will try to move the district and its partners from multiple, diverse efforts to a collective focus and a new way of working together that can sustain itself long after the Challenge has finished its work. Challenge staff also manage programmatic and fiscal aspects of the grant and the matching funds.

Challenge staff work with the district to convene workteams around specific components of *Children Achieving*. These workteams include teachers, school and cluster leaders, district staff from various offices and key partners from the community. Using the *Children Achieving* action plan and the Board of Education's funding priorities for reforms as guideposts, the workteams meet regularly to define the specific work to be done to implement the ten point plan. The workplans outline the specific strategies and tasks to be accomplished and allocate available resources (District, Challenge, other partners). Workplans and workplan budgets are approved by the Board of Education and the Challenge's Oversight Committee. Once workplans are approved, the workteams are expected to provide guidance during implementation, and to update the plans on an annual basis.

Seven comprehensive workplans have been developed in the following areas:

- Standards and Assessment
- Leadership Development
- Teaching and Learning
- Community Services and Supports
- School-to-Career Transition
- Public Engagement
- Technology
- Evaluation

In 1995-96 alone, the Challenge raised $92 million of its $100 million, five-year funding goal. In the first year of the Challenge, $20 million was allocated to a wide range of school district reforms. The largest share of funding went to professional development to strengthen leadership and improve classroom practice. In addition, the Challenge supported the district's efforts to create smaller, safer, more accessible school structures and groupings, increase parental and community involvement, improve coordination of health and social service and develop a broader model of career training and preparation.

The Evaluation of the Challenge

The Children Achieving Challenge charged the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) and its partners, Research for Action and OMG: Center for Collaborative

Learning with the evaluation of *Children Achieving*. The evaluation team's plan was approved in December of 1995, and data collection was initiated in January of 1996. This report examines the progress of school reform during the last half of the 1995-96 school year, from January to June, 1996 and should be viewed as a baseline document. It focuses on the progress of *Children Achieving* in the first six school clusters, as well as the issues and problems that have emerged during implementation.

It should be noted that this report is incomplete in three important respects. First, since *Children Achieving* is a comprehensive reform and Philadelphia is a large district, it has not been possible to give equal attention to all aspects of the effort during this initial six-month data collection period. The evaluation team expended considerable effort on developing procedures and instruments, gaining entry to the clusters, and learning the "lay of the land." Priorities had to be set, and the evaluation focused on the progress of some of the most critical components of the reform: the first six clusters, the Teaching and Learning Network (TLN), the small learning communities (SLCs), and the Family Resource Network (FRN). It would have been premature to address other aspects of the reform in the spring of 1996. For example, when data collection ended in May, councils were not operational in most schools in the first six clusters, leaving the team with little to say about anticipated changes in school governance. Similarly, draft standards were issued in June 1996 and the report has little to say about these proposed standards. In addition, it is too early to expect significant effects on teaching and learning. The report also lacks a districtwide perspective on the progress of reform because we chose to concentrate on the six clusters. A districtwide teacher survey, developed in cooperation with the district and originally scheduled to be administered in May, will now take place in the 1996-97 school year. Subsequent reports will present a districtwide perspective as all 22 clusters will be operational in 1996-97.

Second, quantitative data collected by the district on student experiences and achievement will not be available until the fall. As a result, this report does not include baseline information on student achievement produced by the administration of the SAT9 or the data on student attendance and experiences in school.

Third, a districtwide survey of SLCs, developed by the evaluation team for administration in May, was delayed. This data will not be available until the fall of 1996.

The second of the three "data gaps" described above will be filled in the fall of 1996, when the evaluation team submits a supplementary report. The first and third areas will be addressed through data collection efforts during the 1996-97 school year.

Purposes of the Evaluation

The evaluation of *Children Achieving* seeks answers to four basic questions about the implementation and effects of the reform. First, are the reforms being carried out in the manner envisioned—i.e., are they being successfully implemented? Second, as a consequence of the reforms, are the instructional practices of teachers and the learning experiences of students changing in ways that should improve outcomes? Finally, to what degree can any improvements be attributed to the reforms? These larger questions can be further broken down to capture specific aspects of *Children Achieving*. The subsidiary questions include:

Implementation Questions

- Are the reforms coherent, and are they understood by those they affect? For example, do district, cluster, and school staff share a common vision of *Children Achieving*? If not, how do their views vary, and what accounts for the variation? What are its effects? Are other stakeholders, including parents and the general public, aware of *Children Achieving*, and do they understand its philosophy, objectives, and strategies?

- Are the structural changes being implemented, and with what effects? What roles are the cluster offices playing, and what is their relationship with the schools? Are schools in the clusters creating SLCs? What are their characteristics? Do the SLCs have a clear instructional focus? Are the TLNs being established, and are they fostering effective relationships with the schools? Is the FRN functioning? Are parents more involved? Is the new governance structure functioning?

- Are the new district standards understood, accepted, and used? What are their effects on teaching practice? How do these effects vary and why? What types of curricular and instructional reforms are being fostered? How consistent are these reforms with emerging notions of good practice? Are the visions of the SLCs consistent with the proposed standards? Do the TLNs provide adequate support for implementing the standards? Is professional development adequately focused and of high quality?

- Are there systematic variations in the implementation of the reforms? Do some components move faster or slower than anticipated? Do some clusters do more or less than others? Do schools or SLCs with certain characteristics adopt reforms more readily and more effectively than others?

- What factors account for the variation in the pace or extent of implementation? What is the relationship between structural changes and the pace of instructional change?

- What issues or obstacles are encountered at different levels of the system? Why are they occurring? To what degree do they affect implementation? How are they addressed? With what success?

- How are external resources being mobilized and used? How effective are the district's efforts to build its capacity to support reform? How effectively are different sources of external support coordinated?

- How do internal organizational issues such as communication, coordination, downsizing, capacity, ownership, and collective bargaining affect the implementation of *Children Achieving*?

- How do political, fiscal, and legal contexts affect implementation? For example, is the district management structure changing and functioning in ways that support the reforms? What roles do the Philadelphia Education Fund (PEF) and other contributors to the reform play? Are their efforts coordinated with those of the district?

Effects Questions

- Are the efforts of various district departments more focused and coordinated? Is adequate information available? Is it used? Are central units responsive to clusters and schools? Are district services and products valued? Are cluster services valued by the schools and SLCs?

- Is there a greater focus on instruction, on students and on results in the schools? Is there a higher degree of collegiality, cooperation, and consensus on goals? Are there changes in resource allocation?

- Is classroom practice changing? Are these changes consistent with emerging standards of good practice? What policies, strategies, and structures seem to be most effective in bringing about the desired practices? For example, are any of these measures associated with particular types of learning communities, professional development strategies, or leadership styles?

- Are students working harder, doing better, and learning more? For example, is there better attendance, better discipline, higher achievement, and higher attainment? Are more students participating in demanding courses? Has the drop-out rate declined?

- How do the outcomes vary? What accounts for the variation? What factors—particularly, what aspects of the reform—are most strongly affecting student outcomes? For example, is there greater improvement in achievement in cluster schools with the most "mature" SLCs, or in those with particular types of learning communities? What policies, strategies, structures, and practices seem to be most effective in bringing about the desired outcomes?

Although all of these questions will eventually be addressed by the evaluation team, this report focuses on some critical issues surrounding *Children Achieving*'s initial implementation in the first six clusters. The reader is reminded that this report is intended to provide baseline data, and that the questions it raises are intended to guide the next four years of research, not to reach premature conclusions about whether or not particular components of *Children Achieving* are successes or failures. It is simply too early in the life of the reform and the evaluation to deliver verdicts.

In addition to providing credible evidence about the implementation and effects of *Children Achieving*, as well as feedback to the Challenge and the district, this evaluation is intended to build capacity at the district and cluster levels. For example, the evaluation team is helping the district make better use of data. This effort at capacity-building has taken the form of:

- involving district evaluation staff in the design, analysis, and interpretation activities of the evaluation team;

- helping the district develop and use new indicators aligned with its reform initiative;

- developing new data sets (the teacher and student surveys) that the district can use and amend in the future; and

- working with the cluster leaders to help develop strategies and indicators for monitoring the progress of reform in their schools, and assisting in the interpretation of that data.

The evaluation team is also providing feedback on the progress of implementation to the district leadership and to the cluster leaders.

Focusing on the "Joints in the System"

There are several levels of evaluative inquiry underway. The evaluation team is:

- monitoring student outcomes and examining their variation across sites and over time;
- tracking changes in instructional practice, changes in the experience of students in school, and the relationship of these changes to outcomes;
- tracking changes in school organization (such as SLCs) and changes in the culture and climate of schools, as well as determining the relationship of these issues to changes in teaching and learning and outcomes;
- examining the roles and activities of intermediate structures, such as clusters, the TLN, the FRN, and other networks or collaboratives that are formed by schools or teachers; determining their relationships to the schools; and tracking the pace and nature of reforms in schools;
- examining the relationships among the intermediate structures and between these structures and the central office; and
- examining the relationships among the intermediate structures, the central office, and local partners and support organizations.

At each of these levels, the logic of the evaluation dictates that we examine the co-variation of indicators of change within and across levels of analysis, developing hypotheses to explain the patterns observed and the degree to which they can be attributed to the reforms associated with *Children Achieving*. It is at the horizontal "joints" between activities at the same level, and at the vertical "joints" between the levels of the system, where implementation problems are most likely to occur. For example, in terms of horizontal linkages, do the TLN activities and the work of external support agencies push practice in the same direction? Or, within the schools, how do the local school councils and SLCs interact? Examining vertical linkages leads to questions such as: Do the standards affect the development of SLCs and influence practice? How does the cluster system support the desired changes in the schools? Do the SLCs lead to changes in classroom practice?

Twice each year, during the summer and mid-winter, the evaluation team will examine the patterns of co-variation in the indicators of implementation, changes in practice, and student performance. Based on this analysis, the team will develop hypotheses to be examined in subsequent data collection and select a purposive sample of schools to test those hypotheses through qualitative fieldwork.

Organization of the Report

The report is organized into nine sections, which in turn are organized around broad themes. Findings from CPRE's interviews of district and cluster staff are integrated with findings from interviews and observations conducted in a sample of schools by Research for Action. This first section provided an overview of the evaluation and reviewed the questions that guided data collection. Section II offers a brief description of the work completed by the evaluation team and the methods of data collection employed. Section III examines the theory of action underlying *Children Achieving* and the degree to which it is being communicated to school staff. Section IV reminds the reader of the turbulent environment within which *Children Achieving* is being designed and implemented, and discusses the effects of recent events on the progress of reform. Section V reports on the progress made during 1995-96 in the first six clusters. Sections VI and VII report on the implementation of two particularly critical components of the reform agenda, those aimed at building capacity to improve instruction and those aimed at strengthening social supports for children. Section VIII presents some hypotheses about factors enhancing or inhibiting the pace of reform in schools. The final section provides a summary of the findings and recommendations of the evaluation team.

II. Activities of the Evaluation Team

The evaluation team initiated six streams of work during Phase Two[1] of the *Children Achieving* Evaluation:

- the initial studies of the district and cluster roles in implementing *Children Achieving* and the organizational restructuring that occurred at these levels;
- the design of a teacher survey for administration in the fall of 1996;
- the development of an indicator system for the School District of Philadelphia;
- the study of the initial sample of schools;
- the creation of a consolidated database for the evaluation; and
- the submission of the evaluation plan to the Annenberg Institute for review and approval.

The first two and last two tasks were the primary responsibility of CPRE. OMG undertook the third task, and Research for Action was responsible for the fourth. Additionally, CPRE was responsible for the evaluation's overall management, for the coordination of work, and for the analysis and integration of findings. The specific work completed in relation to these tasks is described below.

Task One: Documenting the District and Cluster Roles in Implementing *Children Achieving*

Beginning in December of 1995, CPRE staff documented the design and initial implementation of *Children Achieving*. To accomplish this, CPRE staff conducted interviews with key central office staff, cluster leaders, TLN coordinators, FRN coordinators, and staff at the Philadelphia Education Fund and reviewed a variety of documents produced by the district. Respondents were asked about their vision for reform; their roles and responsibilities in implementation; their recent activities; the policies, procedures, and strategies being used; the nature and levels of support and collaboration being provided; sources of support; relationships within and across levels; and issues, barriers, and problems encountered. CPRE staff developed protocols for interviewing the cluster leaders and district officials (see Appendix A for the full protocols and the list of those interviewed). In addition, CPRE staff observed a number of district meetings and cluster activities.

Field notes and reports from the cluster-, school-, and district-level were coded and placed in a database, permitting the evaluation team to access and analyze data relating to components of *Children Achieving* or to other key variables across sites and over time, without losing the context of the original interviews. This effort also facilitated data reduction and display, mapping relationships among variables, and the development of hypotheses.

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[1] Phase One included planning and design; document review; and some initial tracking of implementation during the summer and fall of 1995.

Task Two: Development of the Teacher Survey

A second task initiated by CPRE was the development of a teacher survey. As discussed in the Phase II proposal, the purpose of the teacher survey is to paint a broad picture of the progress of reform in schools and classrooms, as well as its effects on curriculum, instruction, assessment, school climate, governance, and community relations. The survey data will permit analysis of the co-variance between indicators of the degree of implementation in schools and quantitative data on student outcomes. This analysis will be used to develop hypotheses about causes and effects that will be tested through an in-depth analysis of smaller samples of schools.

CPRE originally intended to administer this survey in the fall of 1996, with a second administration in the fall of 1998, but when school district officials announced plans to administer their own survey during the spring of 1996 and requested assistance with its design, CPRE stepped up its schedule to collaborate in the development of a common instrument. The plan was to administer the survey in May of 1996 in the first six clusters. However, in May, district officials decided to wait until 1996-97 to administer the survey in all schools in the city, and CPRE agreed to accommodate this schedule.

To facilitate the survey development process and reduce costs, CPRE and district officials have modified an instrument used in Chicago by the Consortium for Chicago School Reform to examine the progress of school reform in that city. Modifications have been made to fit the dimensions and language of *Children Achieving*. In addition, in order to reduce the burden on Philadelphia teachers, CPRE has accommodated requests to include questions from Dr. Kenneth Wong of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Laboratory, which is studying changes in Title I, and from Dr. Milbrey McLaughlin and Dr. Joan Talbert of Stanford University, who are evaluating the DeWitt-Wallace Students at the Center program in two clusters. CPRE staff are also working with the evaluations from the other Annenberg sites to develop some common survey items which will contribute to cross-site analysis and a "national" evaluation of the Annenberg Challenge.

Three meetings were held to discuss modifications to the Chicago survey instrument. Participants in addition to CPRE staff included: Linda Silverberg, Administrative Assistant, Martin Luther King Cluster; Cleo Figgures, Administrative Assistant, Case Cluster; Betsy Useem, Philadelphia Education Fund; Elaine Simon, Research for Action; Tom Clark, district Director of Research and Evaluation; Hal Moss, Philadelphia Federation of Teachers; Rhe McLaughlin from the Office of Schools; and Rob Sebastian, Tom Bernas, and Mike Schlesinger from the district Office of Accountability and Assessment. CPRE hired Karl Landis from the Institute for Survey Research at Temple University as a consultant to review the instrument.

A draft of the survey is included in Appendix B of this report. It was reviewed in the summer of 1996 by the group listed above and will be reviewed by teachers and cluster leaders before the survey is administered in the fall. The school district has agreed to produce, administer, and collect the surveys.

Task Three: Development of an Indicator System

Between December of 1995 and June of 1996, staff at OMG concentrated on two primary activities: working with the School District of Philadelphia's Office of Management Information Services (MIS) to develop a baseline analysis file reflecting the experiences of students enrolled in the school district during the 1994-95 school year; and working with the School District of Philadelphia's Office of Accountability and Assessment to develop a strategy for collecting baseline information on the location, characteristics, and plans for SLCs in operation during the 1995/96 school year.

Baseline Data (1994-95 School Year)

As part of the evaluation planning process, OMG prepared a list of indicators reflecting the characteristics and experiences of School District of Philadelphia students and school staff. Using these lists as a template, OMG staff worked with MIS to classify the indicators into three distinct classes, based on their availability in existing school district computerized files. The three categories are described below.

Students

Category I: These data include indicators of student experiences and characteristics that are collected and maintained by the district and in a form which makes them readily transferable for use in analyses. This category includes basic demographic indicators (gender, race/ethnicity, and date of birth) and recent school experiences (school assigned, LEP, Special Education services, suspension experience, attendance, report card marks, and active/withdrawal status). These indicators are collected in the normal course of district operations. Data quality is generally regarded as relatively high, although some omissions and errors can be detected.

Status: MIS staff have provided an initial beta-test "flat" database for the 1994-95 school year to identify the conceptual and technical issues involved in creating the analytic "base" of students to be used in monitoring student experiences and performance. The initial data file revealed that the district, as part of its regular operations, maintains data on a substantially larger population of students than those who actually receive educational services in district schools. The records maintained by the district include students enrolled in area parochial schools who are provided Title 1 services; special education students with substantial educational and support needs who are enrolled in private settings; and a variety of additional students who either have not enrolled in a public school after applying or have moved from Philadelphia (the district has no further enrollment information on these students, however). Discussions with district staff and the evaluation team have helped refine criteria for establishing a set of students whose experiences will be used for analysis. In general, the analytic base will include *all* students ever enrolled in a School District of Philadelphia school during the regular academic year. Only students who have withdrawn from the district to attend school in another district, who are incarcerated, or who are deceased will be excluded. Students who withdraw or drop out (except for those explicitly noted above) will be included in analysis.[2]

Category II: These data include indicators of student experiences and characteristics that are collected and maintained by the district but for which additional data reduction and processing is required before they are ready for use in analysis. The information includes:

- indicators requiring a summary of students' records across multiple school years, such as total time enrolled in the district, prior enrollment patterns, kindergarten experiences, prior promotion/retention experiences, and school-to-school mobility;

- indicators requiring the creation of a single, appropriate variable to summarize several educational experiences or decisions, such as magnet/special admissions applications experiences, enrollment in "out-of-cluster" school settings, and participation in "gateway" courses;

- indicators based on data collection efforts that are either not universal or have been substantially altered or suspended. Among these are achievement testing data and Title I/Chapter I testing results; and

- indicators requiring authorization or waivers for release. (The most critical items in this category are data related to family economic status. The district receives data from the Commonwealth on AFDC receipt by families but is precluded from matching it to student records by electronic or other means without authorization. Discussions are underway to determine whether an appropriate waiver can be granted for these analyses or if another acceptable method for accessing comparable data can be initiated.)

Status: MIS staff are addressing these issues. For example, enrollment in kindergarten since 1990-91 will be flagged as a student experience. However, for students in elementary grades, there is still work to be done. For example, frequencies related to special admissions/magnet enrollment have not yet been prepared or provided to OMG in order to permit decisions about the definition of an appropriate summary indicator.

Baseline testing data were collected using the Stanford 9 (SAT9) achievement test across grades 2, 4, 6, 8, and 11 during the spring of 1996. This test replaces the annual CTBS testing that was used in grades 1 through 8 in 1993-94. During the 1994-95 school year, the CTBS was replaced by the SAT9 in the initial six clusters for students in grades 4 and 8 but was continued in all other elementary and middle schools for that year. Chapter I/Title I testing was suspended by waiver for the 1994-95 school year and has not been administered during the 1995-96 school year.

Category III: These data include indicators of student experiences and characteristics that are not currently collected systematically by the district and for which a data collection plan must be devised and implemented. The most critical of the data elements that fall into this category are: assignment to, participation in, and experiences with SLCs; and postsecondary experiences.

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[2] For example, students who drop out of school will be included in the denominator in any analyses of normal progress, the percentage passing major subjects, etc.

SLCs, in the form of charters, have existed within comprehensive high schools for several years. According to reports by the Office of Senior High Schools, virtually all students in comprehensive high schools were affiliated with an SLC during the 1995-96 school year. This office has used student roster assignment information maintained by MIS to gauge the "authenticity" of the charter assignment within these schools through an auditing process that is conducted in the fall semester.

Status: At present, despite the apparent tremendous growth of SLCs across the district, no process for identifying and monitoring SLCs in grades K through 8 has been established. Further, the staff who reviewed and monitored SLCs in comprehensive high schools have been reassigned as part of central administration staff-reduction efforts. The development of SLC communities is of interest to the district's finance and budgeting offices, and they are developing accounting strategies to track budget allocations and expenditures at the SLC level. They have adopted a standard system for assigning each SLC a unique program identification number and are re-orienting their accounting and reporting functions to allow the disaggregation of allocations and expenses by SLC.

The evaluation team's proposed analyses of the effects of *Children Achieving* on classroom practice and student performance are premised on the capacity to track and assess the development of SLCs and relate their characteristics to these outcomes. Consequently, the team will be working closely with district staff to understand how decisions about SLC review and official designation certification are made. We will be working with MIS to develop a structured, consistent method for tracking student and teacher affiliation with SLCs. To that end, we have provided MIS with a list and a preliminary ID numbering scheme for the 410 SLCs that were identified as operational by principals for the 1995-96 school year in a May of 1996 survey designed by OMG and the district. We have been told that this ID numbering system will be adopted as the basis for tracking student and teacher affiliation with SLCs in the future.

The *Children Achieving* agenda also calls for measuring the success of schools' ability to prepare children for successful entry into adult life. Evidence of that success could be obtained by interviewing or surveying recent graduates of Philadelphia high schools. Several discussions about a follow-up survey of graduates have occurred, but no final decisions have been reached on the scope of the survey, its timing, or its funding. Neither the administration nor the analysis of a survey of graduates was included as part of the evaluation plan submitted to the Annenberg Challenge.

Faculty

Indicators related to the characteristics of faculty have not yet been the focus of substantive discussions with MIS. However, informal discussions have revealed the following:

- basic demographic information is available;
- information about length of assignments to a particular school may be problematic;

- information on teacher affiliation with SLCs has not yet been collected and no plan has yet been developed (although the accounting department's new system may provide a foundation for such an effort); and

- tracking of teacher participation in Annenberg-supported, PEF-supported, or other district-supported professional development activities related to school reform is not part of the current (or planned) teacher database system.

Identifying Small Learning Communities

OMG's second major activity during the period between December of 1995 and June of 1996 was to develop a survey for collecting basic information about the SLCs in operation during the 1995-96 school year. When *Children Achieving* was initiated, SLCs (charters) were a defining feature of many of the district's comprehensive high schools. In fact, the Office of Senior High Schools reported that virtually all students enrolled in these schools in 1995-96 were associated with one of 132 distinct SLCs. However, no data on the development of SLCs in other settings were available. There was no systematic approach to track the development of SLCs in schools other than comprehensive high schools. The evaluation team recognized the need to catalog the number and type of SLCs that existed as *Children Achieving* began its implementation phase.

Small Learning Community Survey

In an effort to collect comparable data about each SLC operational during the 1995-96 school year, the evaluation team decided to collect basic data from the coordinator or lead teacher of each SLC (or similar program). To identify all of the SLCs in the district, principals at all elementary, middle, and non-comprehensive high schools were sent brief identification forms and asked to name all of the SLCs in operation at their school and each leader teacher/coordinator. The accompanying letter summarized the guidelines that the district had defined for the development of SLCs. Principals were asked to refer to these guidelines when identifying SLCs at their schools. Information or completed forms were received from 226 of the 234 principals contacted.

Based on comments from district staff familiar with the schools, the evaluation team anticipated that the incidence of SLCs would remain biased toward comprehensive high schools. However, it became apparent that many schools were implementing SLC approaches. In addition to the 132 charters/SLCs within the comprehensive high schools, principals in other schools identified more than 275 additional SLCs (See Table 1). This response far exceeded expectations.

Table 1. Number of Small Learning Communities by School Type (1995-96 School Year)

School Type	Number of Principals Nominating:								
	No SLCs	1 SLC	2 SLCs	3 SLCs	4 SLCs	5 SLCs	6 or more SLCs	Whole School SLC[3]	Total SLCs Reported
Comprehensive High School	0	0	0	2	4	1	15	0	132
Other High School	9	3	0	2	1	2	0	1	24
Middle School	11	4	2	2	15	1	4	1	110
Elementary School	106	22	14	18	4	2	3	1	144
Total	126	29	16	24	24	6	22	3	410[4]

Since the principals were asked only to provide a name and contact person for the SLCs they indicated, it was not possible to assess how many of these newly identified programs satisfied the guidelines established by the district. However, the names of some of the nominated programs (i.e., 1st Grade, 7th Grade, Title 1 Program) suggested that they might not all be the kind of SLCs envisioned in the *Children Achieving* design. In the interest of being comprehensive, the decision was made to include all nominated SLCs in the next phase of the study—a survey of SLC leader teachers/coordinators.

A survey was designed to collect information about the degree to which these SLCs were addressing the guidelines developed by the district. This survey was pre-tested with SLC leaders in three different schools—one high school, one middle school, and one elementary school—and was revised based on their comments, as well as the suggestions provided by others who reviewed the instrument.

Coordinators or leaders of every SLC identified by the principals received the survey in early May and were asked to return it before the end of that month (a copy of the survey instrument is included in Appendix C). In the third week of May, the district's liaison was informed by Philadelphia of Federation of Teachers (PFT) leadership that they had directed their members not to complete the survey. An electronic message was transmitted to all schools by PFT telling SLC leaders to ignore the survey. After several weeks of discussion between the PFT and the district liaison, they agreed to instruct teachers to ignore those items requesting the SLC leader's assessment of how supportive teachers and others were of the SLC concept and an item concerning the locus of control over professional development opportunities for SLC teachers.

By July 1, completed questionnaires had been received from only 152 of the 410 nominated SLCs (37 percent). Completion rates were highest among SLCs in non-comprehensive high schools (70 percent) and elementary schools (44 percent). Submission rates were substantially lower among comprehensive high schools (36 percent) and middle schools (22 percent). With the exception of the SLCs in comprehensive high schools, the non-response problem might be attributed in part to poor identification (i.e., programs were nominated by principals as SLCs, but their named coordinators ultimately may have determined that they could not address the questions raised) and in part to confusion caused by the dispute over the survey. The timing of the survey and the delays caused by the dispute over the items also obviously also contributed to the lower-than-desired response rate.

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[3] Principals of several small magnet schools reported that their entire school operated as an SLC.

[4] The total number of SLCs reported in this column does not sum across each row, because the totals were derived by multiplying the frequency reported in each column times the number of SLCs in the column header. The actual number of SLCs reported in each school was used in the aggregated category "6 or more."

The review and coding of completed questionnaires began in the summer of 1996; however, given the low completion rate, none of the anticipated analyses can be undertaken until comparable information is collected from all SLCs. Based on the insights gained from this review and the PFT's suggestions, the evaluation team will work with the district to re-administer a revised instrument at the beginning of the next school year to all SLCs that did not respond this spring.

It is anticipated that, in the spring of 1997, SLCs leaders will be contacted again to update the information collected through this initial effort. The evaluation team, working with district staff, will seek to provide the information collected during this first phase in a standardized format for easy review and revision by SLC leaders. Only leaders of SLCs opening during the 1996-97 school year will be asked to complete a full questionnaire about their initiatives.

School/Principal Survey

At the same time the SLC survey was being administered, a parallel effort was underway to collect additional information about SLC decision making, context, and planning at the school level. A brief survey was sent to every principal. A copy of this instrument is also included in Appendix C. Although some principals were confused about whether or not they were expected to complete the survey, the overall rate of return was high. By July 1, 201 of the 256 (79 percent) principals had returned completed surveys.

A review of the questionnaires completed by principals reveals that a substantial number of new SLCs are expected to become operational during the 1996-97 school year in elementary and non-comprehensive high schools. This finding underscores the critical need to establish a process for reviewing, assessing, and tracking SLCs across the entire district as a normal part of school and administrative operations.

Task Four: *Children Achieving* in the Schools

During Phase II of the evaluation, Research for Action staff visited a number of schools to document the implementation of *Children Achieving* and identify factors affecting implementation of the reforms. They also identified important dimensions to be used in selecting schools for case studies next year.

The Identification of a School Sample

Research in the spring of 1996 focused on identifying and understanding the variety of ways in which the schools are responding to *Children Achieving*. Schools were selected that represented contrasting contexts and approaches to practice along such dimensions as governance, community engagement, and teaching and learning strategies. Ultimately, eleven schools in three of the first six clusters were examined in some depth. With the help of the Office of Schools and cluster leaders, four middle and four elementary schools were selected in addition to the three cluster high schools. Letters from Rhonda Lauer of the Office of Schools and from CPRE introduced the research team to principals and, in some cases, local school councils.

Protocol Development

Research for Action staff developed a detailed set of protocols (see Appendix A) for the interviews with school community members and the observations that took place in the spring. The four broad questions addressed were:

- What history does the school bring to this reform effort? How is the *Children Achieving* agenda an extension of or a departure from this history?

- What is the vision of reform at the school? What factors influence its development? To what degree is it shared among staff and within the community?

- What changes related to the implementation of *Children Achieving* are taking place at the school—including standards-driven teaching and learning, SLCs, support for children and families, and decentralized decision making?

- What kind of support is the school receiving from its cluster and from the TLN? How useful is this support?

Protocols were developed for interviews with principals and school-level administrators, teachers, parents, and counselors/nurses/school-community liaisons. A general observation protocol, and student focus group questions, were also developed. In each school, the fieldwork schedule included interviews with the principal, members of the leadership team, teachers (including local school council members and union representatives), the counselor/nurse/school-community coordinator, SLC coordinators, parents (including local school council members), and students. Observations included those events that school personnel identified as exemplary of the local vision of reform, local school council meetings, professional development sessions, and planning meetings. Fieldwork was conducted between February and the end of May.

Task Five: Developing an Integrated Database

In order to ensure that the progress of the reforms can be accurately tracked over time and that a co-variance strategy can be used to develop and test hypotheses about the effects of the reforms, CPRE has asked its subcontractors to provide raw data for inclusion in a common database. The qualitative data from interviews and observations were coded and are maintained in files that permit comparative analyses across schools and clusters over time. The codes were derived from the conceptual framework guiding the evaluation and from the key concepts identified in the broader literature on school reform. This approach allows qualitative data to be analyzed with the same precision as quantitative data.

Task Six: Obtaining Approval of the Design from the Annenberg Institute

CPRE was responsible for assuring that the evaluation plan submitted to the Children Achieving Challenge was reviewed and approved by the Annenberg Institute. This process began in April of 1996, when the Institute announced a strategy for reviewing the plans. Donald Schon from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) was retained as the reviewer by the Institute. Philadelphia and Chicago were to be reviewed first, since they were the only sites with fully developed evaluation plans.

At the end of April, the evaluation team received a memo from Schon that related generally favorable comments on the plans for evaluating *Children Achieving*. Schon described the plan as "a model that can be put to good use by the other [Annenberg] sites." He felt that it was a serious and comprehensive approach that managed the complexity of large-scale reform in a coherent way. He particularly liked the coordinated use of aggregate quantitative analyses and qualitative school-level work, as well as the team's plans to integrate the two approaches in data collection.

Schon raised some specific questions about the "theory of action" that underlies *Children Achieving*, and asked CPRE to be more explicit about its elements and how the evaluation would address them. He also raised questions about how the evaluation team would deal with the issue of attribution, that is, proving that the effects observed were caused by the reforms. He asked the team to be more explicit about how this analytic problem would be handled.

The former problem was easily addressed, but the latter, the problem of attribution, led to some lengthy discussions among the evaluators. Two significant changes, approved in July of 1996, resulted from these discussions. The first was a shift in strategy from the documentation of a set of schools over a four-year period to one in which school-level work would be used to provide detailed evidence to support specific hypotheses about the causal linkages between components of *Children Achieving* and changes in teaching and learning. This approach entails altering the sample of schools each year, or even bi-annually, in order to answer adequately questions arising from the previous year's data collection and analysis. In this way, co-variations between survey data and indicators of effects (e.g., achievement tests) can be used to develop hypotheses about how *Children Achieving* is affecting, or not affecting, the schools. These hypotheses will be tested by selecting an appropriate school sample for qualitative work in the next time period. That work can also lead to changes in the survey. The second decision was to administer the survey instrument in 1996, 1997, and 1998, rather than only twice as originally planned.

Project Management and Coordination

CPRE is responsible for overall project management and coordination. During Phase II, this effort involved scheduling and conducting team meetings, organizing joint team fieldwork in three clusters and two schools, training the team to use the coding and data management system (Ethnograph), and preparing all reports. It also has involved on-going discussions with the Philadelphia Education Fund, the William Penn Foundation, and the new Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory about the studies of *Children Achieving* that they are currently undertaking. In each case, the purpose and the design of these studies overlaps with the evaluation. These studies offer the possibility of obtaining larger samples and a richer database. They also threaten to overload already over-burdened school and cluster personnel and to reduce their level of cooperation with the evaluation team. For this reason, CPRE is making every effort to coordinate with these other research projects and to avoid redundant data collection.

III. *Children Achieving*: The Theory of Action

To assess the progress and effects of a comprehensive reform such as *Children Achieving*, it is essential to understand the "theory of action" that underlies it. What actions and patterns of behavior do the architects and advocates of the reform believe will bring about the improved state of affairs that they seek? If their theory of causation is understood, some sense can be made out of the many decisions, actions, and messages associated with a comprehensive reform initiative. A theory of action is more than just a vision of a future state of affairs; it is a set of propositions about what must be done in order to achieve the desired ends. It is a theory about deliberate human behavior, and it follows a causal path—action "A" produces condition "B," which leads to the outcome "C." For the agent of reform, it defines the strategies for producing the desired results, but for the observer of reform it offers a way of mapping, explaining, predicting, and evaluating events.

The Annenberg Institute has asked all of the evaluators of the Challenge sites to explicate the theories of action being followed by their initiatives, to compare them to what is actually being done in those sites, and, if the theory is put into practice, to determine the degree to which it leads to the desired results. This approach helps reveal the assumptions being made, the critical linkage points in the plan, and the critical challenges that the reform is likely to face. It also focuses the evaluation on the most critical aspects of the reform.

Philadelphia's Theory of Action

The principal architect of *Children Achieving* is Superintendent David Hornbeck, who brought the plan to Philadelphia and was, in fact, hired to implement it. Hornbeck sincerely believes that incremental reforms achieve little, that the stakes must be raised, and that radical, comprehensive changes are required to help urban children achieve at high levels. His vision has been adopted by the Board of Education as the "ten components" of *Children Achieving*. In his own words, Hornbeck explains:

> There are ten components of comprehensive, systemic change that must occur over the next five years if we are to have the learning environment in schools and communities in which large majorities of all children demonstrate high achievement. In broad terms, they are:
>
> I. We must behave as if we believe that all students will learn at high levels....
>
> II. Standards-based reform will drive the system....We must set standards, have new assessment strategies, and develop new incentive systems for both adults and students in the system.
>
> III. Decisions will be made at the school level. Professionals who are expected to produce results with consequences based on those results, also must have the right to determine how they practice their profession. Authority for decisions about personnel, budget, professional development, instructional strategies and curriculum, scheduling, student and teacher assignments inside of a school, and, perhaps, discipline, should be

> made at the school level....In addition, to school employees, parents must also be partners in making those decisions....
>
> IV. Staff development is critical to improved performance....
>
> V. Early childhood support is less expensive and more effective....There are at least three areas of focus important to school readiness: family support; health and social services; and full-day kindergarten, pre-kindergarten, and child care.
>
> VI. Community services and supports can make the difference between success and failure. Children who are unhealthy, hungry, abused, ill housed, ill clothed, or otherwise face the kinds of problems outside of the school borne of poverty can not achieve at high levels. Therefore, it is imperative that initiatives be dramatically expanded to provide the necessary services and supports to reduce the impact of these major barriers to learning.
>
> VII. Adequate technology, instructional materials, and facilities are necessary to learning....
>
> VIII. Strong public engagement is required. Unless parents, civic leaders, elected officials, the business community, post-secondary educators, and the wider citizenry understand and support radical change, we cannot sustain it....
>
> IX. We must have adequate resources and use them effectively....
>
> X. We must do all of these nine components. The agenda is not a 'pick and chose menu.' We must approach the challenge of education reform in a comprehensive and integrated way. If one or more features of the whole agenda is not implemented, its power to yield high performance by all students will be significantly diminished.[5]

However, the theory of action underlying this vision for *Children Achieving*—that is, the dynamic relationship among the elements that will lead to improved performance—is not explicit in this list of components. Based on other statements made by Superintendent Hornbeck, the theory of action underlying *Children Achieving* would seem to be:

> *Given high academic standards and strong incentives to focus efforts and resources; greater control over school resource allocations, organization, policies, and programs; adequate funding and resources; more hands-on leadership and high-quality support; better coordination of resources and programs; restructured schools in order to support good teaching and encourage improvement of practice; rich professional development of a person's own choosing; and increased public understanding and support, the teachers and administrators of the Philadelphia schools will develop, adopt, or adapt instructional technologies and patterns of behavior that will help all children reach the district's high standards.*

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[5] "*Children Achieving*." A Statement by David Hornbeck, Meeting of the Philadelphia Board of Education, August 22, 1994, pp. 3-5.

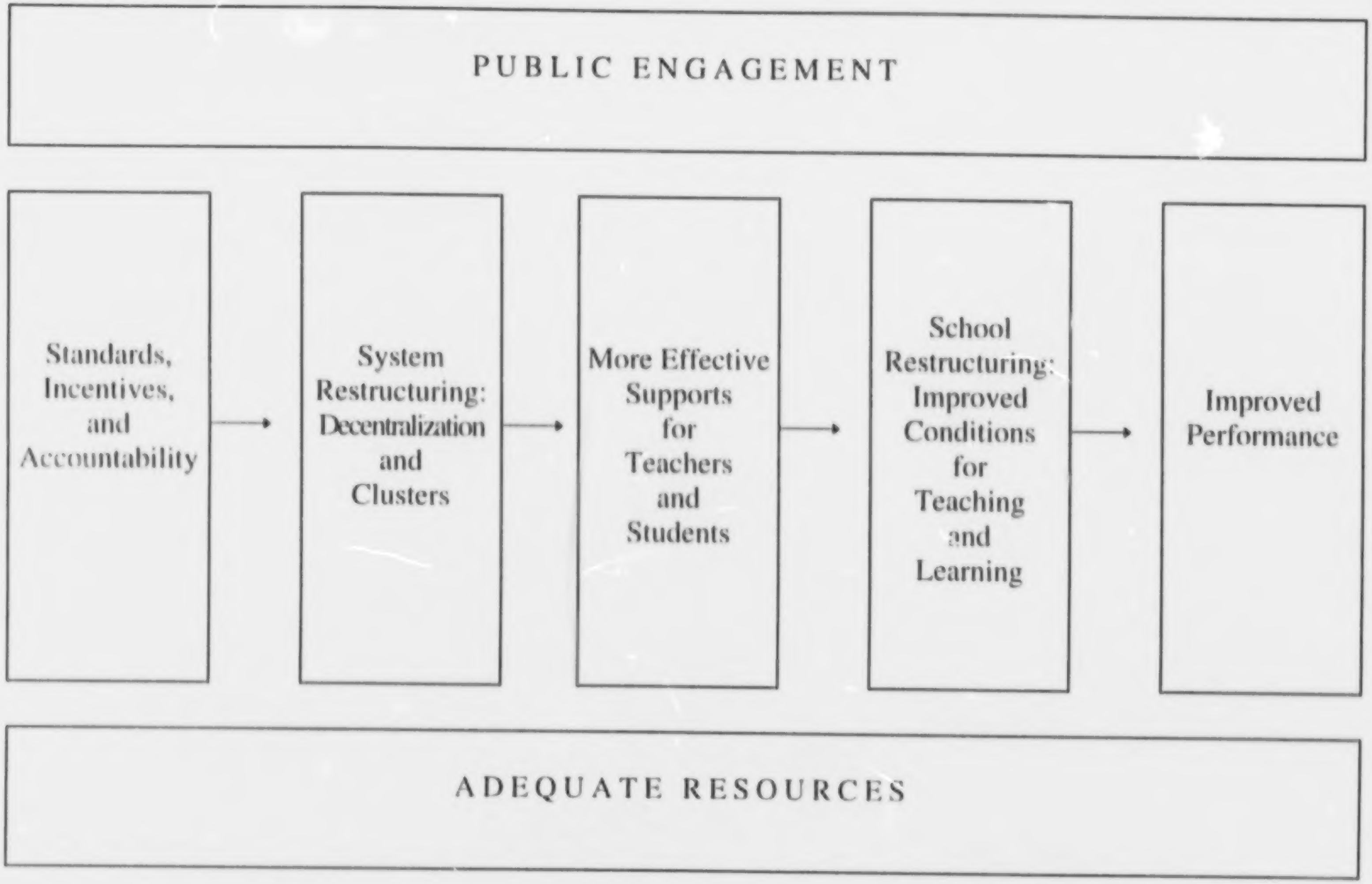
This theory is presented in simplified form in Figure I. While this diagram suggests a linear model of change that oversimplifies the theory, it is nevertheless useful because it identifies the critical domains of action that must be examined by the evaluation and suggests the "joints" in the new system where problems may occur.

The critical "drivers" in this theory are the standards and incentives embedded in the yet-to-be-defined accountability system. It is important to note that neither of these elements of *Children Achieving* were in place in 1995-96. The focus of the first year's work was to develop standards, to put the infrastructure in place that would support reforms in schools and classrooms, to establish the relationships necessary to make the new infrastructure work, to prepare teachers to meet the new standards, and to design and win support for the accountability system and its incentives. The "drivers" will come into play over the next two years, as the standards and accountability procedures are implemented.

Another interesting aspect of the ten-point plan is that neither the cluster organization nor the SLCs are identified as explicit components, although they are nonetheless essential parts of the underlying theory of action. These elements provide leadership and support on the one hand and improved conditions of teaching and learning on the other. Teaming and networking are being encouraged at all levels of the system and are valued as sources of motivation, support, and efficiency. *Children Achieving* seeks to raise productivity and improve quality by reducing the isolation of Philadelphia's students, teachers, schools, and administrators at all levels.

Given this theory, and the particular sequence of its implementation, it is unlikely that widespread changes in professional practice would have occurred during the first year. The elements that would have led to such a change were simply not in place. However, it is not unreasonable to assume that increased professional development and opportunities provided through the decentralization of authority, as well as an anticipation of standards and incentives, would have led the most creative, energetic, and reform-minded educators to initiate changes. Conversely, those who are opposed to reform, those who are unfamiliar with the concept, and those who are apathetic or comfortable with the status quo might be expected to wait and watch in the hope that the "drivers" would never materialize. As a result, the theory predicts uneven results in these early stages of reform.

Figure 1. *Children Achieving's* Theory of Action*


PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT
Standards, Incentives, and Accountability
System Restructuring: Decentralization and Clusters
More Effective Supports for Teachers and Students
School Restructuring: Improved Conditions for Teaching and Learning
Improved Performance
ADEQUATE RESOURCES

* The Theory of Action is presented here in simplified form. While this figure suggests a linear model of change that oversimplifies, it is nevertheless useful because it identifies the critical domains of action that must be examined by the evaluation and suggests the "joints" in the new system where problems may occur.

Comparisons to the Kentucky Education Reform Act

Both the supporters and the critics of *Children Achieving* often compare its design—or, its theory of action—to the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). The comparison should be expected, since David Hornbeck was also involved with the design of KERA. Hornbeck reports that they are, in fact, the same model, with only slight nuances of difference. Table 2 compares some of the basic features of the two initiatives.

Table 2. Comparison of Key Elements of *Children Achieving* and KERA

Elements	*Children Achieving*	KERA
Origin of the reform	The Superintendent's plan to address a dire situation; no legal mandate.	State law passed in response to a Supreme Court finding that the state education system was unconstitutional.
Standards	Explicit content standards developed by district committees. Distributed in Year 1 of the reform.	Goals and broad academic expectations defined in 1990. Standards were implicit in the assessment system (KIRIS), but core content standards were defined in 1996.
Curriculum	To be developed by SLCs based on the standards.	State curriculum framework issued in 1994, but curricula are developed by each school in response to KIRIS and the state's academic expectations.
Governance	Local school councils, including teachers and parents, are being elected. Authority is not yet clear.	School-based decision-making councils with parent majorities with budget and personnel authority mandated for all schools except for those that exceed their performance targets and choose not to have councils.
School Organization	Teachers are encouraged to form SLCs.	Non-graded primary (K-3) mandated.
Assessment System	SAT9 used in grades 2, 4, 6, 8, and 11. Performance measures are being piloted in some clusters and schools.	Performance-oriented state assessment (KIRIS) in selected grades. Portfolios in math and writing. Standardized tests added in 1996.
Accountability	Not yet developed. Proposed improvement targets for schools, as well as rewards and sanctions.	Two-year cycles with school targets based primarily on KIRIS; monetary awards for school staff exceeding targets; strong sanctions for declining schools.
Support for school staff	Funds to schools for professional development and TLN.	Funds to schools for professional development and support for Regional Service Centers.
Social Supports	Full-day kindergarten, Family Resource Network, school readiness initiative.	Family Resource Centers; preschool; extended school services.

While some similarities in the designs of the two initiatives are obvious, there are also some important differences. Enacted by the state legislature, KERA has the authority of state law. Most importantly, the legislature provided sufficient funds for its implementation. *Children Achieving*, on the other hand, is a policy document drafted by the Superintendent and adopted by the Board, not a state law. Since the Board has no authority to tax, it is dependent on other public and private agencies to fund the reform. The initiative had to be marketed to state and local policymakers, civic and business leaders and to various funders to gain their support. Additionally, the

Superintendent and the Board must still convince their own employees, and their unions, that the plan is sound and mutually beneficial in order to ensure a full-faith effort by everyone to implement the reforms.

Another difference between *Children Achieving* and KERA is that, in the latter case, the assessment and accountability system—with both its rewards and sanctions—was enacted at the beginning of the effort, while in Philadelphia it is still being designed. In Kentucky, the instructional focus and the incentives were made clear from the outset. The new assessment system and high standards also increased public awareness of the need to improve performance, and the steady improvement in most areas over the past four years has helped to build public support.

Both initiatives have faced considerable opposition. KERA has survived three attempts by opponents to derail it. Six years of hard work by many educators and consistent gains on the new assessments have not yet persuaded a clear majority of the state's citizens that it is working, although an increasing plurality say that they support the reforms. KERA continues because of the persistence of a coalition of education, civic, business, and political leaders deeply committed to its basic principles, and because this coalition has been willing to make adjustments in response to reasonable criticisms and thereby has avoided more damaging revisions advocated by opponents. *Children Achieving* also faces considerable opposition and must also build a strong coalition of champions if it is to have an opportunity to succeed.

The Cluster Perspective on the Theory of Action

The six initial cluster leaders appear to support the Superintendent's basic philosophy and vision for the district, and they seem to understand the theory of action being advocated. In other words, they comprehend the centrality of the standards, the potential power of decentralization, the importance of support structures, and the critical roles they must play as facilitating leaders. However, they differ somewhat in their judgments about the plan's adequacy as a guide for reform. Several leaders complained that there is no roadmap, no explicit process, for moving from the current to the desired state of affairs. One leader said, "Hornbeck gave us the vision, but we have had to create a process." In this view, the role of the cluster leader is to provide an explicit theory of action for realizing the broader vision. However, several other cluster leaders said that they were there to provide support to the schools, and it was up to the schools to decide how to move toward Hornbeck's vision, suggesting that school staff had to develop their own theories of action about how to improve student performance.

The opinions of cluster leaders also differed in their beliefs about whether schools had adequate capacity to realize the vision. Several expressed doubt that given decentralized authority schools would make "good" decisions about instructional reform and professional development. In their view, school staff lacked sufficient knowledge and experience and needed stronger guidance and assistance from the district and the cluster. In contrast, one cluster leader said that there would be no need for a cluster in five years; the schools would become self-governing organizations.

Several cluster leaders felt that the district's messages about *Children Achieving* tended to emphasize the parts rather than the whole. As a consequence, school staff members did not see how the various pieces fit together, and the tasks seemed overwhelming. One leader said, "It is not a coherent program to [school staff], just a set of projects."

The School Perspective on the Theory of Action

Impressions of the *Children Achieving* agenda at the school level vary widely. At this point, there appear to be five broad categories of response among school staff to the initiative:

- it has brought new vitality and values to the system, and things are changing;
- the agenda is sound, but not new; it reflects what we are already doing;
- it simply asks too much given the circumstances—however noble, it is not realistic;
- it is misdirected, threatening, or addresses the wrong problem; and
- it is confusing and perhaps overwhelming.

Given the absence of districtwide data, it is impossible at this time to estimate how many people fall into these five categories or how strongly they hold these views. However, two things seem clear: (1) the more direct contact teachers have with the development of *Children Achieving*, the more likely they are to be supportive; and (2) many staff in the first six clusters have been energized by the leadership provided by the cluster staff and the opportunities provided by the professional development funds.

School members' understanding of elements of *Children Achieving* vary according to the degree of their direct involvement in planning and implementation. Classroom teachers, busy with everyday demands, tend to be the least informed. Those involved in a standards writing team, a task force related to the Urban Systemic Initiative, or some other activity within a cluster tend to be better informed, since their participation may have brought them into closer contact with cluster staff. There are also indications that the amount of reform-related discussion that occurs in school-level meetings and planning sessions varies widely. Many of our interviewees said that they learned about *Children Achieving* from the media and admitted that, although they had the "booklet" (the Action Design), they really had not read it very carefully.

In discussing *Children Achieving* as a reform agenda, school community members—teachers, administrators, and parents—focus on four elements:

- the comprehensiveness of the vision;
- the high expectations set for everyone, with students meeting performance standards and teachers being held accountable for their students' learning;
- the adequacy of school resources;
- the increased family and community participation in decision making; and

- the more intimate and cohesive teaching and learning contexts.

The vast majority of the school community members interviewed agreed in theory with the major tenets of *Children Achieving* and, in particular, with its holistic approach. Their comments include:

> How can you disagree with it? It's common sense.
>
> This is an air-tight reform agenda.
>
> The Ten Points make me conscious of the need to do all things all the time, to pay attention. To do it halfway is not good enough.

But a central irony in most school community members' perceptions of *Children Achieving* is that they are skeptical of whether it is "doable." Citing resources as a primary concern, they doubt that such a comprehensive reform is feasible. They wonder: How can such an ambitious reform agenda be realized when funds are being cut?

> That is the most depressing thing about teaching in Philadelphia. Every year there is less money. I teach first grade and the books have to be consumable. I can't use those books anymore because we can't buy them. A lot of books are out of date. We don't have books for every kid. It is like, when you sit down at dinner time, in the beginning you have an appetizer, a salad, something to drink, the entree, then desert. Every year they are taking something away: first the appetizer, then the drink. We almost have crumbs right now. And, the students we get now are hungrier.

School community members also doubt the district's ability to coordinate the implementation of the agenda at the central office, at the cluster level, and even within their own schools. Given the fleeting nature of many reform efforts, they also wonder if this one will endure: Will the district be able to sustain the focus and energy needed to implement the ten-point plan?

School community members emphasized high expectations for student achievement in their descriptions of what is important in the new reform agenda.

> *Children Achieving* is about schools doing all they can do to provide services so that students can achieve. The root strategy is to put decision making at the school level, providing professional development so teachers adapt to students, increasing the use of technology, involvement of the parents.

This ideal was often interpreted as paying more attention to those students most at risk for academic failure. Parents, teachers, and administrators alike recognized that teacher accountability would be tied to high expectations for students and that accountability itself was a salient component of reform.

They also connected standards to accountability. But, here, they became less clear about specifics. They mentioned numerous sources for standards: NCTM, Project 2061, the Standardized Curriculum, and Pennsylvania's outcomes-based education. They were unclear about who would set the standards, how they would be assessed, who would hold them accountable for student learning, and what consequences they could expect if standards were not met. Some teachers welcomed "more objective" measures of their students' progress. Others worried about the fairness of teachers being held accountable without a corresponding responsibility being placed on parents and the larger society for student achievement. They believed that this concern ought to be addressed in the reform vision and plan.

> I understand that Hornbeck wants to reward teachers whose students do well. The people who make up these activities and standards are not in the classroom. Until you're in the classroom and you close your door, you find that you can't do some of those activities with your students. Students can't achieve unless teachers achieve. And parents and guardians must also have a share [of accountability].

In a few places, school community members described a growing "culture of accountability" that was a part of the fabric of the school community and was related to externally imposed standards for student performance.

> All of us [in the SLC] share the thinking that *Children Achieving* is a new notion of standards, performance, and evaluation of students. I believe it will bring us closer together as a small learning community.

When most teachers and administrators spoke of family/community involvement, they referred to parents becoming more active in their children's educations. They connected this involvement to "accountability for all." Parents should be accountable for their children (especially for their behavior in schools) and society at large should be accountable for providing the resources necessary to support children's learning, especially those most at risk of failing.

> Society doesn't stop at the school doors. There's one of me and 33 of them. The standards are going to get families involved. That's what's missing. I'm very involved. I call home to students. Family involvement is necessary for children to achieve. Otherwise they have no reason to.

Some teachers and administrators expressed concerns about the appropriateness of parents participating in educational decision making.

> I see some of these parents who aren't educated, some use crack. They aren't articulate, and they don't know how to get things done like parents in the Northeast might. I think that is unfair. When communities make decisions, the variables among them can be uneven.

Few mentioned the relationship between engaging families and community in public schooling as a strategy for building public will to secure adequate funding and resources for schools.

School community members expressed the most excitement about, and hope for, what they perceived to be *Children Achieving*'s emphasis on creating more intimate and cohesive teaching and learning contexts for young people and adults. They pointed to improved articulation across schools within the cluster and to SLCs as strategies directly related to creating educational coherence and trustful relationships.

> Now that we are in clusters, schools are in close proximity with each other. We share a newsletter together. We are hoping inter-school visits will occur....Our vision is to increase sharing between faculties, resources, and schools...Clusters are smaller, more intimate. [T]he region was just too large to really get to know your neighbors. Or even to know one or two neighbors well. We are hoping that this will increase our intimacy, our relationships with other schools, and it is just beginning.

Issues and Questions for Future Research

The integration of components of *Children Achieving* and the linkages across levels are being designed as the reform is being implemented. It is hard to ascertain whether the apparent gaps or ambiguities in the emerging system are the result of inadequate design, uneven implementation, or the learning that must occur to accomplish something significant on such a large scale. The theory introduces standards, clusters, decentralized governance, small learning communities, teaching and learning networks, and a high-stakes accountability system. All of these components are new, and glitches should be expected.

The theory of action will be put to the test in the next year as standards are implemented in schools and as accountability procedures are made more explicit, looming ever larger on the horizon. How will the clusters and schools respond to this challenge? Will cluster leaders step forward to offer schools a focus, or clearer choices? On what basis will such decisions be made? Will effective SLCs emerge, and under what conditions? How will teachers respond to the increasing pressure to improve performance, as well as to the increased opportunities for professional growth?

What will the 16 new clusters learn from the first six? What path will they follow—will the cluster leaders offer schools a clear vision and focus their resources and energies, or will they encourage the schools to select their own direction, and chose to be responsive to school initiatives? What effect will the resource reductions have on their ability to stimulate change in the schools?

Children Achieving does not offer teachers a clear and explicit vision concerning improved teaching and learning, although a vision—or visions—may be embedded in the assessments chosen, the professional development offered, and the partners selected. It is instead a theory of action that seeks to create the conditions and the capacity under which teachers will work together to develop or adopt their own strategies for improving teaching and learning. That effort is supposed to be undertaken by the SLCs. How well SLCs carry out that role will be a major focus of future research, as will the ways in which other elements of the reform influence their development.

There are other important questions about how the theory of action will be translated into a theory of practice. One of the major issues raised by the theory is how the standards will affect the creation and functioning of SLCs. Another is how local school councils will interact with SLCs, and what their respective roles will be regarding teaching, learning, professional development, and hiring.

IV. The Context of *Children Achieving*

Appraising the progress of *Children Achieving* requires some understanding of the difficult context within which it is being implemented. Its design and implementation have been affected by previous efforts at school reform in Philadelphia. The reform agenda has been modified to fit the confines of shrinking federal, state, and local education budgets, in addition to desegregation mandates handed down by the Commonwealth Court. State and city political leaders questioned the district's reform strategies and priorities. Philadelphia Federation of Teachers union leaders have characterized the plan as an effort to take away teachers' hard-won rights, impose reforms of dubious value, and hold teachers accountable for curing society's ills. And media coverage of the reform has been uneven, sometimes offering support or raising important questions about the viability of the plan, and sometimes fostering public distrust of the system. How has the district has addressed these problems, and how have they impacted the progress of *Children Achieving*?

Historical Context

In October of 1994, just two months after the Board of Education named David Hornbeck as Superintendent, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* published a special section, "A District in Distress," which graphically illustrated the desperate situation facing Philadelphia's schools. The article cited declining test scores, severe segregation, inequitable resource distribution, and increasing poverty levels as "dismal" and "cause for despair." Taken as a rough baseline for the new Hornbeck administration, the article's statistics are sobering:

- less than half of Philadelphia students entering high school in 1989 graduated four years later;

- only 15 of the City's 171 public elementary schools scored above the average on nationally normed reading tests;

- students in only two high schools, both magnet programs, scored above the national average on the SAT;

- test scores correlated directly with poverty levels (at the time of the *Inquirer* report, nearly half of all Philadelphia students came from families receiving public assistance); and

- exacerbating the situation, Philadelphia had among the lowest per-pupil spending in the area, but had a tax burden twice as high as neighbors in suburban counties.

Despite this discouraging situation, the School District of Philadelphia has a legacy of reform efforts prior to David Hornbeck's arrival. Many of these initiatives were highly regarded, and some were very similar to aspects of *Children Achieving*. Although cataloging every reform would be difficult, it is helpful to discuss a few of these initiatives here.

In the mid-1980s, Superintendent Constance Clayton initiated a set of policies aimed at creating "Educational Excellence and Equity." They included a standardized curriculum for all subject areas and a "pacing schedule" that suggested how teachers should move their students through a course's subject matter. A school improvement planning process was developed, and a citywide testing program was aligned to discrete curriculum objectives. The testing program provided schools with a tool to monitor student progress toward the achievement of goals specified in school improvement plans.

Clayton also built new partnerships with higher education institutions and the private sector. This resulted in the creation of PATHS/PRISM (Philadelphia Alliance for the Teaching of Humanities/Philadelphia Renaissance in Science and Mathematics), a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting educational reform through professional development activities for teachers.

Additionally, in 1988, The Pew Charitable Trusts provided a grant to develop the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative, an effort to restructure neighborhood comprehensive high schools. Large, comprehensive high schools were broken up into smaller units, or schools-within-schools, called charters.

At the forefront of innovations in "blended" funding, Philadelphia was also an early adopter of Title I schoolwide projects—a Federal reform program designed to support academically and economically needy students. Eligible Philadelphia elementary and middle schools developed school leadership teams to oversee school-based decisions over Title I spending. Vocational (Perkins) and special education funding followed suit, and an ever greater degree of authority and decision making was passed down to schools. With encouragement from the business community and the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative, the district introduced school-based management/shared decision making (SBM/SDM) throughout the district. Unfortunately, this initiative entered schools at the same time that budgets were reduced. Many teachers and other staff became distrustful of SBM/SDM, viewing it as a device to cope with budget cuts.

On a more positive note, Philadelphia has established teacher networks that provide vigorous contexts for teachers to explore their practice and investigate, individually and collectively, who their students are and how they learn. The Philadelphia Writing Project, the Teachers' Learning Cooperative, Science Resource Leaders, the Math Science Congress, and the Gratz Connection are examples of the locally and nationally affiliated networks that have nurtured a growing corps of teacher leaders in Philadelphia.

Additionally, in an effort to promote middle-management involvement in reform, the Philadelphia Elementary Principal Internship (PEPI) program was established. A selection and training program to groom new principals, PEPI was popular with those involved. Unfortunately, professional development of this type was never extended to new middle and high school principals, nor to experienced principals.

None of these reforms proved to be comprehensive or powerful enough to alter the conditions of teaching and learning citywide. Some had positive effects in selected schools, but the dire statistics presented by the *Inquirer* reveal the limitations of these initiatives. They did, however, provide a starting point, introducing human resources strategies that could contribute to new school improvement efforts.

Public Awareness and Public Will

Despite these "pockets" of reform, the School District of Philadelphia has been failing dramatically for many years, with little public outcry. *A Philadelphia Primer*, a plan submitted to Judge Doris Smith by seven external educational experts as part of the district's long-running desegregation case (see below) cited "a failure of public will" as one of the reasons the system had served so many students so poorly for so long.

While Constance Clayton's 12-year tenure provided Philadelphia with a stability rare in urban districts, her tight management style contributed to a lack of community engagement in public schooling. Under her administration, information about student outcomes was difficult to access and rarely made public. This policy has changed under Hornbeck's leadership; he believes that "only by knowing the dimensions of the problem will educators, elected officials and the wider community be able to make the decisions necessary to change them." The *Inquirer* report, described above, was the first clear indication of this new policy.

While assessing the level of "public will" for education reform in Philadelphia is beyond the scope of this report, it is clear that *Children Achieving* has generated increased public discussion about the city's schools. Local media, particularly print media, have played a key role in this area. While the coverage has not always been positive, few Philadelphians remember a time when public education was more prominently debated.

In particular, the *Philadelphia Daily News*, one of two major dailies, has assumed the task of monitoring the district's activities. While the paper's avowed goal is to stimulate public discussion of the reforms, the thrust of its stories seems to be to undermine public confidence in local education officials. In addition to reporting on the controversies surrounding *Children Achieving*, the paper has given front-page coverage to allegations of waste and abuse within the district, despite audits and budget reviews by independent groups which indicate that the Board is running a tight ship. The other major paper, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, has staunchly supported *Children Achieving* in its editorials, but has given less coverage to the district's activities overall.

Both papers did encourage their readers to attend Public School Sunday, a communitywide effort to bring citizens and school leaders together to discuss public education. This kind of public discussion is unprecedented in Philadelphia. While some people feel that the media-generated debate about the schools has weakened support for *Children Achieving*, district leaders feel that the controversies and increased exposure have had the opposite effect, causing business, civic, and local political leaders to rally in support of the Board of Education's agenda. In either scenario, *Children Achieving* has brought public education to the forefront of the public agenda in Philadelphia.

The Fiscal Context

When David Hornbeck first proposed *Children Achieving* to the Board of Education, the estimated cost of full implementation was $1.5 billion over a five-year period, an increase of $300 million annually over current funding levels. Unfortunately, the reforms were initiated during a period of declining funding for schools. In 1995, for the first time in five years, the Governor of Pennsylvania proposed a freeze on state aid to basic education. Since Philadelphia relies on state funds for more than half of its school budget, this freeze was a serious blow, particularly because school district officials had been hoping for a 2 percent increase in state aid to help fund *Children Achieving*. News from the federal government and the city was no better. Since 1993, the district has lost approximately one-third of its Title I money, and the city's contribution to the school district is expected to decrease in 1997 due to a weak property tax base. Making matters even worse, the Philadelphia Board of Education, unlike other school boards in Pennsylvania, has no independent taxing authority.

With fewer dollars flowing into the city and no ability to raise more, the school district faced a serious fiscal crisis in the first year of the reform initiative. In March, after making some difficult budget cuts, the Superintendent appeared before City Council with a proposal for a $1.4 billion budget that included a $148 million deficit. The projected deficit included $58 million needed to maintain existing services in the district and another $90 million to fund *Children Achieving*. Because the City Charter required that the Board of Education produce a balanced budget by May 31, the district was soon under pressure to fill the fiscal gap by making additional cuts. Not surprisingly, as district officials began to recommend eliminating such popular programs as after-school athletics, music, and other extracurricular activities, the public began to protest. During several City Council meetings, parents, community leaders, and business executives expressed the need for better schools and more money. Scores of witnesses called on the council to help prevent any further budget cuts. Yet, few individuals, including school district officials, recommended raising taxes to fund the deficit. There was near-universal agreement that Philadelphia taxpayers were already overburdened, and that raising taxes would be counterproductive to the city's revitalization efforts.

The fiscal crisis facing the school district and the public outcry about budget cuts soon dominated media coverage, and some city officials began to question the necessity of Hornbeck's plan. In the initial stages of budget deliberations, City Council President John Street publicly asked whether the $90 million needed to fund *Children Achieving* could not be put to better use by paying for additional teachers and buying more books for students. The challenge for school district officials was to keep parents, students, teachers, and principals focused on the inadequacy of funding by the state and city, rather than blame *Children Achieving* for "causing" the district's budget crisis.

As the budget deadline grew closer, the City Council approved legislation that re-authorized city taxes, giving the schools a one-time $15 million increase above and beyond the projected revenues. The state legislature also contributed another $14 million to the school district, but a large budget gap remained.

In its final budget proposal, the Board of Education cut $67 million from the reform agenda, $20 million from instructional expenditures, and $18 million from administrative and other non-teaching costs. The budget crisis has forced a scaling-back of support for the reform agenda in the coming year. The next 16 clusters will be brought on-line with fewer resources than the first six. For example, the first six clusters received $18 per student for improvement activities, but the next 16 will receive only half of that amount.

The Court

The recent budget crisis illustrates some of the challenges posed by Philadelphia's political and fiscal environment, and its aftermath sheds light on yet another issue: the complex relationship between the school district and the Commonwealth Court. As soon as the budget was passed, Judge Doris A. Smith summoned the Superintendent to appear in Court to face contempt charges, citing his failure to fund programs, such as universal full-day kindergarten and pre-school, which she had ordered as part of her decision in the district's desegregation case, *Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC) v. School District of Philadelphia (SDP).* With bailiffs ready to escort him to jail, the Superintendent pledged, with the support of all nine members of the Board of Education, that the Judge's programs would be funded, either through resources from the state or cuts in other areas. Although the crisis was temporarily diffused, this drama demonstrates one of the most important factors effecting the implementation of *Children Achieving*—the Judge's influence over the school district's policies and priorities.

Although the desegregation case has been in progress for nearly 30 years, the Judge's role has only recently been magnified. Until 1983, *PHRC v. SDP* was characterized by the usual desegregation debates: the plaintiff, the PHRC, favored mandatory solutions to the problem, including busing and forced school pairings; the district opposed such measures and, for the most part, successfully resisted the plaintiff's attempts to have the court impose a solution. Plans to reduce segregation relied largely on the creation of magnet schools and voluntary transfer programs.

A turning point came in 1983, when the district was ordered to modify its 1976 desegregation plan which was ruled a failure. Still opposed to mandatory busing, the SDP developed the Modified Desegregation Plan, which effectively transformed the lawsuit into an argument for systemwide educational equity. In addition to traditional magnet school and voluntary transfer desegregation options, the Modified Desegregation Plan espoused higher graduation and promotion standards and increased professional development and community mobilization.

By broadening the scope of the lawsuit, the Modified Desegregation Plan also widened the Court's purview over school district operations, setting the context in which *Children Achieving* reforms are being crafted and implemented. While the Superintendent has consistently emphasized the common ground they share, the relationship between the Judge and the district has become increasingly unpredictable. Early in his administration, Hornbeck convinced Judge Smith that *Children Achieving* would fulfill her Court order. Apparently in harmony with the Judge's wishes, the district prepared to submit the *Children Achieving* Action Design as a blueprint for reform. However, when the Action Design was submitted to the Court in February of 1995, the Judge's three-member monitoring committee responded by issuing a critique of the plan. Yet, only two weeks later, after hearing testimony from Hornbeck and his top aides, the Judge rejected the findings of the monitoring committee and announced she was "tremendously reassured" about the viability of the reform plan.

Even after this endorsement, Judge Smith ordered the school district to revise *Children Achieving* to include school uniforms, more magnet schools, and increased family involvement. She also criticized the school district for proceeding with reforms, particularly the cluster organization, that she had not authorized. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, while acknowledging Smith and Hornbeck as the "key players" in the city's education reform efforts, editorialized that the Judge's order showed an "alarming tendency to micro-manage the school district in ways that could seriously hamper the progressive agenda crafted by David Hornbeck." More recent dramas illustrating friction between the Court and the district include the threatened jailing of the Superintendent (described above) and the Judge's ruling restricting the role of the Philadelphia Education Fund in developing standards and providing professional development for the district (see below for further detail).

Paradoxically, while the Judge's rulings and critique of *Children Achieving* have sometimes created problems for district officials, she has also proven to be a powerful supporter of the city's schools and the *Children Achieving* agenda. She issued what Michael Churchill, lead counsel of the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia, described as an "extraordinary opinion" when she joined both the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the City of Philadelphia as co-defendants in the lawsuit. The Court's rationale for this decision was a ringing endorsement of *Children Achieving*, stating this was the first time in the suit's history that the district had developed a viable reform plan. This order may put pressure on the state and the city to provide the additional resources needed to support Philadelphia schools.

Recently, the state Supreme Court reviewed the extent of the Commonwealth Court's orders in *PHRC v. SDP*. They took oversight of the case, warning Judge Smith that her rulings were treading too far beyond the scope of desegregation issues. It is unclear what effect this will have on Judge Smith's role in the case, but it is likely that the Courts will continue to influence the implementation of *Children Achieving*.

Political Context

The school district and the *Children Achieving* agenda have been threatened with one crisis after another. Even the *New York Times* reported that the Superintendent "faces a battle on all fronts." These "fronts" are not limited to critical media, fiscal crises, and legal mandates; the Board also has been forced to contend with criticism from its most potentially powerful supporters: the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia City Council.

The State

In April 1996, Judge Smith added the state to the 25-year-old desegregation lawsuit against the School District of Philadelphia, making it potentially responsible for paying some of the costs of her mandated reforms. To avoid this financial responsibility, state officials argued that the school system had both the capacity and resources to enact all of the reforms mandated by the Commonwealth Court and to balance its budget—all it had to do was cut many of the components of *Children Achieving*. Attorney Edward Mannino, who was quoted in the *Inquirer* as calling the reform a "pie-in-the-sky" idea, did little to bolster public support for the *Children Achieving* agenda.

In addition, the state contributed to the school district's fiscal crisis by freezing basic public education aid. Since 1993, the state has shortchanged Philadelphia schools by $326 million, failing to keep spending levels consistent with its own funding formula. The number of children on welfare in Philadelphia (which is part of the allocation formula) has increased by almost 20,000 since 1993, but the "equalized subsidy for basic education" has not kept pace with the increase. District officials argue that if the state had simply followed its own funding formula, the Board would not have faced such an enormous budget deficit this spring.

Governor Tom Ridge's own school reform priorities underlie the debate over state funding for Philadelphia's public schools. The Governor has made no secret of his support for a voucher plan in Pennsylvania. He proposed spending an additional $42 million for vouchers in fiscal year 1995-96, and his plan would increase this figure to $340 million in the fifth year. He argued that this additional money could be allocated with no reduction in the state aid already committed to the Philadelphia public schools. City officials were left to question why some of the funds could not be used to support the reforms proposed by *Children Achieving*.

The City

While Mayor Edward Rendell has been a consistent supporter of Superintendent Hornbeck, other city officials have been skeptical. Although Hornbeck was ultimately able to convince City Council to back the reform, *Children Achieving* initially faced staunch opposition from City Council, particularly from Council President John Street. In addition to questioning the usefulness of *Children Achieving*, the council raised the issue of the residency of Hornbeck's cabinet and questioned how the school district proposed to allocate funds.

In 1983, the School District of Philadelphia established a residency requirement for new employees, but state law exempted workers hired before that date. During questioning by members of City Council, Hornbeck revealed that 14 of the school district's cabinet-level officials were living outside the city. Street demanded that Hornbeck force these employees to move into the city, despite the fact that they were hired prior to 1983 and were thus legally exempted from the requirement. Street's position was that these officials had a right to live outside the district, but not a right to serve as cabinet members.

To put pressure on Hornbeck to comply, City Council delayed the vote on the authorization of school taxes—which produce 40 percent of the district's revenue—until the Superintendent produced what they deemed a "rational and reasonable" policy on district employees who live outside of Philadelphia. Hornbeck acquiesced, announcing in March that all cabinet members currently living in the suburbs must establish residency in Philadelphia by July 1, 1997. Not surprisingly, the affected officials were upset. One unidentified administrator was quoted as saying that Hornbeck "sold his team down the tubes," and it was reported that as many as ten of the 40 cabinet members were considering leaving the district before the 1997 deadline. The first six cluster leaders also protested, writing a letter to Hornbeck expressing their objection and threatening to leave the cabinet. They subsequently decided to remain in their positions.

It was widely reported that Hornbeck hoped his response to the residency issue would inspire City Council to lobby Harrisburg for increased school funding and possibly allocate more city dollars to the district. Ultimately, City Council did "find" an additional $15 million in the city budget to give to the schools (see above).

Council officials also questioned how district officials planned to allocate funds for the purchase of textbooks. During hours of public testimony over the proposed budget cuts, scores of parents and students described the deplorable conditions in their neighborhood schools. Numerous witnesses, one a particularly eloquent fifth grader, testified that many students did not even have the necessary books for their classes. After listening to such testimony, City Council questioned district officials on the amount of money spent per child on textbooks. After learning that the district currently spends an average of $53 per year per child on books, council members demanded that Hornbeck amend his budget to increase this allocation. As this debate was played out in the media, *Children Achieving* was again portrayed as a reform that was taking resources away from the district's capacity to meet basic needs. Street argued that perhaps the $90 million allocated for *Children Achieving* would be better used to hire additional teachers and buy more textbooks.

While Council President Street was initially critical of *Children Achieving*, he ultimately chose to support the agenda. During a City Council meeting in May, Street helped the Superintendent explain some of the components of the agenda to other members. District officials viewed this as a breakthrough in their discussions with City Council.

The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers

Another factor that has affected—and will continue to affect—the progress of *Children Achieving* is the sometimes contentious relationship between district leadership and the teachers' union, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT). Many district officials see the union's leadership and the current contract (in place during the 1995-96 school year) as major barriers to school reform. Conversely, the union leadership believes that Hornbeck is attempting to revoke the hard-won rights of teachers, impose reforms of dubious value, and make teachers accountable for solving the ills of society.

Obviously, if both parties could find common ground for cooperation, it would be easier to accomplish changes in school organization and improvement in instruction. However, it is not clear that either party has made much of an effort to build such a relationship. Both sides say that the union has been invited to participate in the committees and workgroups associated with *Children Achieving*, but they also agree that the PFT has had little influence over the shape of the reforms or their implementation. They offer differing explanations of why this has been the case. District officials say that they have sought PFT participation and input, but that union leaders have not actively participated or, when they have, have often been obstructionists. The union says that the invitations have not been genuine—and have been, perhaps, manipulative. The union claims that they are not invited to the meetings "that count" and that, in reality, a small inner-circle of district officials makes all of the decisions.

There is a long history of management-labor distrust underlying this troubled relationship, and objectivity is difficult for either party to maintain. It appears, however, that the district leaders have not made a whole-hearted effort to win the support of the PFT, and that the PFT is opposed to both the spirit and specifics of the reforms.

Only a few days after Hornbeck presented his proposals for a new 1996-97 contract to the union, teachers voted overwhelmingly to authorize a strike if contract talks hit an impasse. While this vote was routine, PFT President Ted Kirsch publicly criticized the Superintendent's proposal as "punitive" and said that he expected a strike to occur. Many contentious issues were on the table:

- *Accountability*. The Superintendent wanted to hold teachers accountable for student achievement by awarding group performance incentives when students did well and issuing sanctions when they do not. The PFT was adamantly opposed to this approach, arguing that the proposal was inherently unfair and divisive because of variations in teaching situations. While the Superintendent believed that it would lead to increased cooperation and productivity, the PFT feared it would result in unfair treatment and divisiveness.

- *Salary*. In 1994, teachers received a 5 percent pay raise over a two-year period. However, the massive budget problems made raises a difficult issue—the larger the salary increases resulting from the current negotiations, the larger the district's budget problem would become, and the more difficult it would be to fund the reforms. On the other hand, the district needed a committed and highly motivated workforce to make the reforms work.

- *Longer Days*. Prior to talks, elementary teachers were required to work from 8:45 a.m. to 3 p.m. (the shortest day in the Commonwealth), but the Superintendent wanted them to work from 8:45 a.m. to 4 p.m. The union was requesting extra compensation for this time.

- *Preparation Time*. School district officials wanted to restructure teachers' preparation time without increasing pay. The union viewed the district's plan as reducing prep time.

- *Seniority*. The Superintendent wanted to give individual schools the right to hire teachers, eliminating seniority as a factor in the decisions. The union wanted to maintain the seniority system.

- *Governance*. The Superintendent sought increased authority for local school councils and SLCs. The PFT objected to giving parents authority over personnel decisions and asking teachers to take on administrative responsibilities without additional compensation.

Fortunately a settlement was reached before the opening of school, and a strike was averted. Both parties expressed satisfaction with the new four year contract. The economic package was viewed by observers as both fair and fiscally sound; there was a slight increase in the length of the school day, some changes were made in the support provided to teachers receiving poor evaluations, and seniority rights remained in place. Both parties agreed that the accountability procedures sought by the superintendent and board were management perogatives and did not require changes in the contract. Most importantly, it was a four-year contract, providing an opportunity for the two parties to develop a cooperative working relationship in support of school improvement. The impact of the settlement on the progress of school reform will be tracked in the coming years.

The Business Community

As a condition for receiving the $50 million from philanthropist Walter Annenberg for the *Children Achieving* initiative, the school district and its partners had to raise $100 million in matching funds—$50 million in government aid and another $50 million from a combination of foundations and corporations (as described in Section I). The effort has been headed by a non-profit group, Greater Philadelphia First (GPF), the parent organization of the *Children Achieving* Challenge, which represents the 35 corporations asked to contribute to the match. GPF provides management and fiscal oversight for the Challenge through the GPF Partnership for Reform, composed of representatives from the GPF board, community organizations, the school district, and the PFT. By June of 1996, civic leaders in Philadelphia had raised 92 percent of the required $100 million.

The business community stood behind the Superintendent and his reform agenda during the difficult weeks when city council, press, union leaders, and the court were criticizing or questioning his leadership and plan. On June 16, business and civic leaders purchased space on the editorial page of the *Inquirer* to ask the community to come together in support of Hornbeck and *Children Achieving*.

The Philadelphia Education Fund

The Philadelphia Education Fund (PEF) was created in 1995 through a merger of the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative and PATHS/PRISM: The Philadelphia Partnership for Education, two long-standing and respected educational reform organizations. PEF is a non-profit organization affiliated with a network of other local education funds across the country and is one of the organizations eligible to receive matching funds for the Annenberg Challenge grant. PEF is supported by grants from funders such as the Pew Charitable Trusts, the DeWitt-Wallace Foundation, the William Penn Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Education. One of PEF's primary goals is to raise funds to improve educational opportunities for children and youth in Philadelphia.

PEF's three-year $8.8 million grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts was designed to encourage a close working relationship between PEF and the district. As a result, PEF has worked with the district and the Children Achieving Challenge on the development of workplans for the programmatic areas funded by the Pew grant: Standards and Assessment, Teaching and Learning, and Leadership Development. PEF staff supported and coordinated the work of the teams developing the content standards for the district during 1995-96.

In the spring of 1996, PEF entered the political maelstrom surrounding *Children Achieving* when the court, the media, and city leaders focused their attention on its work and its leadership along with that of the district and the superintendent. In March, a newspaper article alleged that PEF's Executive Director, Warren Simmons, implied that racial politics were a factor in the public criticism of David Hornbeck and *Children Achieving* in a speech he made at a professional meeting in New Orleans. Simmons was subsequently asked to appear before City Council to explain his remarks. Additionally, in April, Judge Doris Smith ordered PEF to cease and desist its work with the district on the development of standards, arguing that PEF is "neither subject to the requirements of the Public School Code of 1949...nor...to audit by the county controller or state auditor general...and is accountable to no government body or agency." The district filed an appeal to that decision resulting in an automatic stay and PEF resumed its work on the standards late in the school year.

Although it remains unclear what the long term impact of the turbulent events of the spring will have on PEF's role in Philadelphia school reform, in the short-term, they weakened its ability to provide support to the district's implementation of *Children Achieving*.

Summary and Conclusions

The School District of Philadelphia and its partners are trying to implement a broad and ambitious reform agenda in a highly turbulent environment. The political, fiscal, legal, and public relations problems described above already have affected the pace of reform and could, if unchecked, affect its long-term viability. There is no doubt they have affected public confidence in the district and support for reform. They also have consumed enormous amounts of time and energy, distracting district leaders from the tasks of implementation. And, the fiscal battles have left the district without the resources to fully support the reform efforts planned for 1996-97.

Unfortunately, not all of these issues have been resolved, and some of them will continue to plague the district during 1996-97. The fiscal problems are projected to worsen next year. It seems probable that the court will continue to raise questions about the district's priorities and operations. The impact of the new residency requirement will be felt in the coming year, as some key officials start to look for other positions and leave the district with a "leadership gap" to be filled next spring.

Despite these hurdles, the implementation of *Children Achieving* is proceeding, and district leaders express optimism about next year. They point to the growing support they are receiving from local political, civic, and business leaders as a harbinger of increased public support for the reform agenda. They believe that the public will rally behind their efforts and transform a turbulent, if not hostile, environment into one that is supportive of reform.

V. The Progress of Reform

How much of the *Children Achieving* agenda was implemented during the 1995-96 school year, and what were its initial effects? This section of the report summarizes the major accomplishments of the past year and addresses some of the issues raised in the process of implementation. The major areas of activity in 1995-96 were:

- completion of the seven district workplans for *Children Achieving* ;
- implementation of a new form of district organization—the cluster;
- development of content standards to guide the design of curriculum and assessment procedures in the schools;
- creation of new support structures to assist schools—funding for professional development, the TLN, and the FRN;
- development of new structures within schools to foster changes in governance and instruction—local school councils and SLCs;
- design and initial implementation of a new assessment and accountability system tied to high standards;
- implementation of full-day kindergarten in all racially-isolated elementary schools and early classroom leveling procedures;
- engagement of community resources in schools via the Alliance Organizing Project and Project 10,000;
- changes within the central office itself; and
- attainment of $95 million of the $100 million required to match the Annenberg Challenge grant.

The progress made in six of these areas is described in this section. The development of the new support structures is discussed in Sections VI and VII. Other aspects of the reform will be examined in a subsequent report.

Table 3 summarizes the progress made by the district in the critical areas listed above during 1995-96. The data in the chart indicate that *Children Achieving* is in an early stage of implementation. While much was achieved during 1995-96, major elements of the reform were just being implemented at the end of the year, and other pieces are still being designed and negotiated. The primary drivers of the reform—the standards, assessments, and accountability procedures—were not yet in place at the end of the school year. Even in the first six clusters, where substantial progress was made, critical elements of school reform (the SLCs and local school councils) were just being put in place as the summer recess began.

Table 3. Major Components of *Children Achieving* Implementation Scorecard - 1995-96

Children Achieving Elements	No Action Taken	Interim System in Place/ Development Underway	New System Designed	Partial Implementation of New System	New System Operational or Task Completed	New System Generally Perceived as Effective	New System Proved Effective
District Workplans					X		
Clusters - 6					X	X	
Clusters - 16				X			
Content Standards I[6]			X				
Content Standards II[7]		X					
Opportunity to Learn Standards		X					
Teaching and Learning Network				X		X	
Family Resource Network				X		X	
Small Learning Communities				X			
Local School Councils				X			
Performance Standards	X						
Assessment System		X					
Accountability System		X					
Public Engagement				X			

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[6] Mathematics, science, social studies, English/language arts.

[7] Health, physical education, social studies, and world languages.

Based on this overview of progress, 1995-96 should be treated as a baseline year, and those concerned with the effects of the reform on teaching and learning should set their sights on 1996-97 and beyond. The effects can be expected to occur in two overlapping stages, with widespread changes in school organization and structure, curriculum, and pedagogy generally preceding improvements in student performance. These changes are likely to occur in an uneven pattern, with high-capacity schools (see Section VII) making greater progress in the first few years.

If *Children Achieving* is successfully implemented, if there are adequate resources in the schools, and if sound decisions are made about changes in teaching and learning, then it would be reasonable to expect the following patterns of improvement to occur:

- in 1996-97, some schools in the first six clusters would show significant performance gains, while others would largely show stable performance or small gains; schools in the new 16 clusters would demonstrate some positive effects from adjusting their curricula to the new tests, but they would exhibit smaller gains overall;

- in 1997-98, most schools in the original six clusters and some schools in the next 16 would begin to show significant gains; many schools in the 16 "new" clusters would show stable performance; and, across all 22 clusters, a small number of low-performing, even declining, schools would be identifiable; and

- in 1998-99, the majority of schools districtwide would continue to make significant gains; some schools' performance would stabilize, requiring more district assistance; and some low-performing schools would make gains in response to district interventions.

Based on the experience of other comprehensive reform initiatives, such as those in Kentucky and Chicago, evidence of sustained increases in student achievement across the district is not likely to appear before 1998-99. And, of course, this projection assumes that a more stable environment than the one evident in 1995-96 will develop and that adequate funding will be available.

The *Children Achieving* Challenge Workplans

Seven workteams were assigned the responsibility of translating *Children Achieving*'s ten-point reform agenda into detailed implementation plans. The teams were assembled by the *Children Achieving* Challenge and the school district. Their work was critical because the Challenge Oversight Committee mandated that Challenge funds would not be allocated for tasks until a workplan was approved. In some cases in order to move forward with the reforms, the district had to spend its own funds with the understanding that they would be reimbursed by the Challenge once the relevant workplan was approved.

Workteams were led by senior district officials and/or leaders of partner organizations, and their members included representatives from appropriate units in the central office, the schools, the PFT, and various partner organizations such as Greater Philadelphia First, PEF, the Alliance for Public School Advocates, local universities, and other participating organizations and groups. The Children Achieving Challenge provided resources and technical assistance to the workteams. Beginning in the summer of 1995, and continuing through the fall and winter of 1995-96, the teams met to develop plans for:

- productivity and management;
- teaching and learning, and SLCs;
- standards and assessment;
- school-to-career programs;
- leadership development;
- the FRN; and
- evaluation.

These plans established a more detailed vision of the reforms, identifying strategies to be used and specific tasks to be accomplished. Drafts were reviewed by workteam members, the Superintendent's cabinet, cluster leaders, central office staff, union leadership, members of the Board of Education, and partner organization staff. The plans were subsequently approved by the cabinet, the Board, and the Children Achieving Challenge Oversight Committee.

The workplan process proved to be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it was highly participatory and brought together individuals from within and outside the district who otherwise would neither have had the time nor the opportunity to discuss policy. The dialogues raised issues that required discussion, sometimes led to a new consensus about what had to be done, and sometimes created new working relationships. The plans were significantly improved through this process.

On the other hand, the process itself was slow and not well-understood by those who were not members of the workteams. Although there was broad participation, some central office and school staff members perceived the process to be top-down and relatively closed. Also, the pressure to complete the plans quickly and obtain approval sometimes caused workteam leaders to put important and unresolved issues aside.

Overall, most participants thought it was a worthwhile process. The workplans will be updated annually based on the progress made, evidence of effectiveness, new information and opportunities, and changes in local context.

The Clusters

The first six clusters became operational in 1995-96. They included 67 schools with a total enrollment of approximately 60,000 students. Each cluster provided leadership and support for reform in a small grouping of K-12. The new organization moved planning and decision making closer to the schools in order to increase participation of school staff and enhance their motivation. Each cluster office maintained a small staff to handle administration, work on public outreach and engagement, and support the efforts of the schools to plan improvements and implement local school councils, SLCs, and the FRN. Each cluster had a leader, one secretary, an administrative assistant, a Teaching and Learning Coordinator, an FRN Coordinator, and a number of Teaching and Learning Facilitators (four to six) and Instructional Support Teachers (two to four).

Overall, the six clusters made considerable progress in 1995-95. (The implementation of specific elements is discussed below.) The cluster leaders recruited staff, set up an office, established working relationships with principals and school staff, determined how to allocate operational funds, participated in fund-raising, and set priorities for improvement. The workload and pace were demanding. However, all six clusters established successful working relationships with their principals, initiated a number of clusterwide improvement efforts, found external partners to assist them, and persuaded and helped schools to implement the organizational and governance changes associated with *Children Achieving*.

Each cluster leader defined his or her role, and the roles of cluster staff, somewhat differently. Some were more proactive, offering their schools a vision for the reform of teaching and learning and specific strategies for instructional reform; others tried to facilitate the development of a consensual vision with the schools; and still others chose to be responsive to needs and priorities defined by the schools themselves. These strategic differences are discussed in Sections VI and VIII.

School participants noted the benefits of increased communication and better articulation across schools at different grade levels. They also understood the advantage in pooling resources for purchasing curriculum and consultant services clusterwide. Acting collectively, schools were able to extend their individual capacity to purchase curriculum materials and training. Having a common direction or program across a cluster also contributed to improved articulation.

Cluster leaders faced a number of problems. Perhaps foremost was overcoming the resistance and skepticism of principals and teachers. Based on our school data, cluster leaders have not yet solved this problem, but they have made considerable progress. They made some headway with winning teachers' support for aspects of the reform despite PFT's public opposition to *Children Achieving*. They also gained the respect of most of the principals we interviewed.

Cluster leaders undertook the difficult tasks of motivating staff to take risks and make changes and of setting a direction for their schools without the aid of the principal drivers of reform—the standards and the accountability procedures. Many school staff did not understand or fully accept the vision of reform emanating from the central office, and cluster leaders had to act as translators and advocates. The content standards developed by the New Standards project were intended to serve as interim guides for teachers, and were distributed and discussed, but they did not seem to have a significant effect on practice. However, the district's interim assessment instrument, the SAT9, did provide a focus for changes in instruction and curriculum.

While the cluster leaders reported adequate communication and support from the Office of Schools, they complained about poor communication with other offices and the slow pace of change in the central office. Most leaders felt that budget and purchasing procedures were still too slow and cumbersome. They also objected to inadequate lead time, which frequently necessitated last-minute decision making. Cluster leaders felt that artificial deadlines set by the central office for implementing SLCs and local school councils were forcing schools to take action before they were ready. Several said that the central office was pushing decentralization too quickly, transferring responsibility to unprepared school staff. They also complained that the size of their support staff was inadequate to handle the workload being shifted to their offices.

The 16 clusters scheduled to become operational in 1996-97 face major challenges. With at least one less staff member and smaller operational budgets, they will have to work with even fewer resources than the original six clusters. They also may find it harder to raise external funds due to competition with 21 other clusters. The dual supervisory structures used for the TLN, FRN, and new Equity Support Coordinators will be tested when central office staff find themselves coordinating and supporting the efforts of 22 staff, rather than six. Going systemwide will put the cluster theory to a critical test—does the cluster organization itself have intrinsic benefits for improving performance? Implementing new structures and relationships in 67 schools is no small achievement, but it still represents only slightly more than one-quarter of the district's schools.

The Standards

The centerpiece of *Children Achieving* is the development of content and performance standards, which are expected to shape curricula and professional development, stimulate instructional improvement, and drive performance. In 1995-96, the New Standards Project's draft content standards were used to provide interim guidance to schools in the first six clusters. Most observers did not feel that these interim standards had a great impact on teaching or learning, possibly because most school staff did not use them, preferring instead to wait for the district's standards.

The development of district standards was a cooperative effort between the district and PEF until April of 1996, when Judge Smith ruled that the process could not be delegated to an external group. PEF and the Office of Standards, Equity, and Student Services (OSESS) had provided staff support and information for the seven standards writing teams composed primarily of parents, teachers, and administrators. In fall and winter 1995-96, the writing teams drafted standards for math, science, the arts, and English/language arts and then revised them in the spring. They were distributed to expert reviewers in late spring, reviewed by broad-based teams of teachers, administrators, and parents, and subsequently revised in-house. This version was distributed to all teachers at the end of the school year. Further revisions will be made based on feedback from teachers. Current plans call for the Board of Education to adopt the standards late in 1996 for implementation in the 1996-97 school year.

Standards in the remaining subjects (health and physical education, social studies, and world languages) will be developed during 1996-97, and the "cross-cutting" standards will be embedded in the subject-oriented standards. Opportunity to learn standards will be developed in the fall of 1996.

The Schools

In order to improve instructional practice and student performance, teachers require a clear understanding of the relationships among standards, curriculum and instruction, and assessment. In the eleven schools studied in the spring of 1996, teachers' awareness of these relationships varied. Staff in all of the schools reported some professional development related to standards by the TLN and/or the Urban Systemic Initiative and Project 2061. All of the elementary and middle schools reported professional development on the new SAT9 testing program. Examples of the use of standards in two schools are described below.

School A

Interviews in this school revealed confidence about the staff's ability to meet expectations regarding standards. Over the past five years, involvement with PATHS/PRISM's Partners in Change (now part of PEF) and Project First has provided rich professional development experiences and practice in curricular development. The previous principal is credited with planting the seeds for such efforts. "He wanted us...on the map, raise the name...to a positive light...get teams organized around curriculum changes. We had a partnership with PATHS/PRISM and had many 'Partners in Change' workshops and seminars. Whatever interested our staff and whatever the school needed, he tried to get everyone on board. Teams went on retreats for thematic workshops. Our goals were to raise the scores in math through using the NCTM standards across the curriculum. All the subjects are now trying to incorporate science across the curriculum as well as writing across the curriculum."

Teachers are presently receiving training in the development of rubrics, improving student writing, and introducing a greater degree of problem solving into math curricula. Teachers continue to be enthusiastic about these initiatives: "[Standards are] an excellent idea that find ways other than paper and pencil to know what children are actually learning. Children Achieving has supplied computers, they instituted the Stanford 9 exam. Once I saw it, I had to reevaluate what I did in my own class." While many teachers may not be as receptive as this veteran teacher, who has been an active participant in many professional development activities, her comments and those of others in this school do reflect an acceptance of standards as a way to gauge and improve student performance.

School B

Standards assumed two dimensions at School B. The principal felt "standards" were needed for student behavior as well as academics. He discussed his resolve to improve the school's attendance and tardiness record and to hold students accountable for graffiti on school walls. In this context, "standards" meant establishing behavioral guidelines for students in order to improve morale and create a sense of safety within the school community.

SLC coordinators and other teachers focused on the academic aspect of standards. Many expressed philosophical agreement with the goal of developing more rigorous and engaging approaches to teaching and learning. No one discounted the need to improve performance within the classroom. In fact, efforts to develop standards were cited as one of the most promising aspects of the reform. For example, one teacher relinquished her position on the PFT Building Committee in order to concentrate on the continued development and implementation of math standards. While she was hopeful about academic avenues for creating change, this teacher believed progress was being stunted by disorganization within the school, which inhibited the dissemination of information on professional development opportunities.

Small Learning Communities

The district defined SLCs by their ability to conform to certain characteristics. SLCs should be:

- heterogeneous—including all children;
- multi-year—providing a close relationship among students, parents, and teachers lasting longer than one school year;
- unified—built around a theme or an instructional approach;
- instructional—promoting strategies that help students reach high standards;
- collaborative—providing time for teachers to work together and grow professionally;
- a connected community—students and teachers spending most of their time in one community;
- empowered—having the authority and resources to design their own instructional program;
- accountable—responsible for improving student performance; and
- small—having less than 400 students.

The rationale is that more intimate and personal teaching and learning environments will motivate teachers, helping them to improve practice, create stronger bonds between teachers and students, and consequently motivate students to improve their effort and performance. Philadelphia has had experience with this approach through the "charters" in its comprehensive high schools.

As discussed in Section II, a survey of principals indicates that schools are making progress in developing SLCs. In the 234 schools that responded to our survey, 410 SLCs had already been established. However, the names of some nominated programs (i.e., 1st Grade, Title I Program) suggested that not all of them met the criteria described above.

The Schools

While most staff members understood some of the basic features of SLCs, there was some confusion over how they would function in practice. In the elementary schools and some of the middle schools, staff generally understood the idea that SLCs should involve multiple grades and be theme-based, but many questioned whether SLCs needed to involve all of the grades, how a theme would be incorporated, and how SLCs would affect long-established grade-level groups. Even in high schools, where SLCs have been in place for a few years, there were questions regarding whether expectations had changed. While some settings had initiated bold experiments with new forms that could become SLCs, others struggled with the concept of what SLCs might look like in their schools. Some elementary schools were comfortable hosting a variety of forms, but other sites lacked ideas, models, and a sense that experimentation was sanctioned. Middle schools had experimented with similar models in the past, and some staff members expressed cynicism about revisiting discarded approaches.

The four elementary schools visited by the evaluation team were in the exploratory stage with SLCs. At three of these schools, processes were in place to develop a variety of SLC models. Staff in two of these schools, both of which had made significant progress in forwarding schoolwide pedagogical reforms in recent years, expressed uncertainty about SLCs. Their schools were already small and already had climates characterized by a close-knit faculty and caring relationships between teachers and students. Teachers and administrators wondered how SLCs would increase their schools' ability to meet the academic needs of their students and worried that the energy and attention needed to create SLCs would distract from other teaching and learning innovations underway. Staff in another school, which did not have a productive history with reform and had not yet organized a process for planning SLCs, questioned the need for developing them at the elementary level.

Unlike those in elementary schools, staff in the four middle schools had some familiarity with SLCs through their experience with "houses," and many saw the value of these smaller units for students. Although all four middle schools had house structures in place, each school brought a different history to bear when considering how *Children Achieving*'s SLCs fit with their existing houses. One middle school planned to devote full attention to the further development of its houses. This school had successfully forged common ground among the staff on several teaching and learning initiatives; they now wanted to intensify their efforts at building strong houses with distinctive educational programs. At two other middle schools, houses were in place and valued, but the overall school conditions were less conducive to their support. Staff in a fourth middle school, which had been creating houses since it was built, expressed some skepticism over the house structure's ability to make a difference for students. At this school, students and many teachers changed houses every year, although in 1995-96 a few teachers followed their students and reported that the relationships they fostered had had a positive effect on student learning.

SLCs were in place at all three high schools. Some of these SLCs had established collaboration among teachers and a sense of "family" among students, while some had a thematic focus, indicated by their course offerings and/or methods of classroom instruction. However, staff at all three schools also reported a lack of progress in establishing basic supports for SLCs, such as control over professional development and roster integrity for teachers and students. For these reasons, high school SLCs seemed fragile.

School C

School C's SLCs were loosely defined and included grade groups, thematic units, and multi-cultural efforts (i.e., Grandparents' and International Day). Although it was never stated, staff and administration seemed hesitant to establish SLCs because they could potentially interfere with the group solidarity felt to be the school's strength. Staff held notions about SLCs that were different from the district's characteristics. "[At the summer institute] we found out that there wasn't one definition of an SLC. They were still in the process of developing this concept and in elementary schools there is a real problem because high and middle schools have houses and charters. We don't have such a thing; but we have grade groups and we try to break down our meetings, our agendas, our topics to be discussed and our focus...A lot of things we do at our school we consider to be SLCs. There are no right and wrong answers to this."

School D

SLCs were a priority at School D during the 1995-96 school year; three SLCs were up and running, and a fourth and final SLC was planned for the coming year. Many of the staff we interviewed were optimistic about the effect this last SLC will have on the school. They hoped that it would provide an opportunity for all students to choose the community they wanted to join. They also felt it had the potential to reduce the student population in the established SLCs and to discourage tracking by providing more attractive options to all students.

Budgetary problems have obstructed the creation of small, stable, heterogeneous SLCs in School D. The shortage of teachers and an uncertainty over which teachers will remain in coming years precluded block rostering. One teacher's comments revealed how previous, failed attempts have fueled cynicism among teachers: "I feel pretty optimistic [about the new SLC], although I shouldn't. People have said, 'Remember the Tech Prep charter? That was Perkins money, too.' Computers gone in a year...It fizzled out and they took everything. That could happen [again]."

Local School Councils

Local school councils (LSCs) are another key component of the *Children Achieving* reform, and the central office issued guidelines for their composition. Each council must contain a majority of teachers selected by a process that is determined by the PFT Building Committee, the principal, and the parents chosen by the Home and School Association. Middle schools and high schools must include two students on the council. To be an official council, 35 percent of the parents must vote in the election of the parent representatives. Until that target is achieved, a council only has interim status.

The councils will consult with the school community and develop plans for public engagement; develop disciplinary and other schoolwide policies, such as security, maintenance, facilities operation and use, and transportation; review school improvement plans and budgets; make recommendations about teaching and learning through review of the curriculum; and report to the public.

The 67 schools in the first six clusters were expected to hold council elections and have a functioning council by the end of the school year. Only 12 met the 35 percent target by June 1, 1996; the remainder created interim councils. Cluster staff reported that schools faced considerable difficulty eliciting the participation of parents. The members of all 67 councils were provided with training.

Most of the cluster leaders felt that this change to local decision making was rushed, and that neither the schools nor the parents really understood what was expected of them. Most said schools offered considerable opposition to the council concept . Two expressed the concern that the councils would not have any real power, and that, in the end, both teachers and parents would be disillusioned.

The Schools

At the time of our fieldwork, eight of the eleven schools studied (one high school, three middle schools, and four elementary schools) had held elections and set up interim LSCs. None of the schools had met the 35 percent participation requirement. At three of these schools, the LSCs had not yet met because the PFT Building Committees objected to teacher participation without corresponding compensation.

Three elementary schools and one middle school had structures and processes in place for broad participation in planning and decision making prior to the advent of *Children Achieving* and the LSCs. These schools had functioning leadership groups and had established schoolwide committees with clear responsibilities and authority for planning. The middle school, after building a strong schoolwide leadership team, was beginning to devolve authority to houses. At all four of these schools, teachers and administrators expressed the concern that LSCs would negatively affect the progress they had already made in shared decision making. It was unclear how the responsibility and authority of the LSC would fit with existing structures that no one wished to dismantle. They worried that participation in schoolwide committees would decline if a smaller group had the "real power." At these four schools, LSCs were already meeting, but these meetings tended to be pro forma. Real decision making was invested in other school structures.

At one elementary school and two middle schools, LSCs were stalled, because PFT leadership wanted compensation for teacher participation and/or further clarification about LSC authority. At these schools, and the two high schools that did not yet have LSCs, staff described bitter and contentious histories with school-based management and shared decision making. Teachers and administrators expressed cynicism and skepticism about shared governance.

At one middle school and one high school, a substantial number of staff expressed some hope about LSCs, despite difficult histories and current conflicts. These two schools had, not surprisingly, encountered problems, but were plodding forward with establishing working councils. At both schools which were in different clusters, the TLN had provided effective support and training at pivotal moments.

School E

School E's two most salient features were its "democratic" decision-making structure and its unified staff, who work together to meet the challenge of teaching disadvantaged children. Decision making, problem solving, and planning occurred in schoolwide committees. Teachers praised the principal for his ability to inspire staff members and to delegate responsibility and authority to others. One teacher said, "The real secret of the school is the principal. He makes people feel like they want to go the extra mile. It is not an authoritarian situation here. In many schools the principal feels like he has to come out with a whip. That is not the way he works. Everyone signs up for different committees."

Ironically, because teachers already felt empowered, the prospect of establishing an LSC received lackluster reception. The principal explained that, "the teachers didn't really want [an LSC] because they didn't feel the need for it....They were worried it would bring animosity among teachers. It divides." Teachers also expressed this concern and wondered what impact the council would have on the school's popular committee structure. "In authoritarian schools, *teachers may feel that since the principal has only one vote they will gain more control over their destiny. But it is just the opposite here. We still don't know how much power the council will have in contrast to the union or the leadership team or any of our committees."*

Nevertheless, the school made progress toward establishing a council, and some teachers seemed to be optimistic, viewing an LSC as an opportunity to build better connections with the community and to explore staff-development options.

School F

LSC members had been elected in School F, but the council was not fully operational. A teacher, also a PFT Building Committee member, explained the reluctance: "In 1993 we tried shared decision making. The Building Committee was thought to have too much power on the governance council. The faculty thought information wasn't being shared...There was a lot of resentment by the faculty...There is a bad taste left in everyone's mouth from the governance council. Those who were on the council before felt that nothing ever came from their efforts. The principal put out flyers announcing the forming of the council, people weren't readily accepting."

A parent volunteer expressed a different sentiment. "It's a shared decision making situation. We sit down together and decide what is good for our school. No one is higher than anyone else on this council, majority rules." Such fresh perspectives may allow the present council to redeem the image of local decision making. However, at this point, it was not held in high esteem. In particular, the principal was disillusioned about site-based management: "How much decision making can I grant, if I'm not getting it from on high....I'm still getting decisions from on high—do this and do that...decisions are still coming top down." One of the areas that particularly discouraged the principal was the budget. While a generous amount of money was promised to the school for professional development, she felt that she had to "jump through hoops" to access it.

Any action resulting from shared decision making appeared to be a spillover from curriculum reform initiatives that the school had successfully undertaken in recent years. Teachers met in houses to consider what they wanted in the curriculum. Each house had active parent volunteers who participated in planning.

School G

Governance was School G's hottest issue last year. In theory, shared decision making found support among teachers, parents, and administrators, including the principal: "I'm comfortable sharing decision making....It takes a while for people to have input....[Y]ou can't do it alone, you need participation....We are doing it collaboratively, so you won't be able to blame me about the budget." Equity among LSC members appealed to some teachers: "Everybody's equal from the principal to the custodian on the local school council. You have parents, vice principals on there. Everybody has an opportunity for dialogue, and I think most things here get started by dialogue."

But, in practice, the LSC provoked—more aptly, revealed—strong divisions among teachers, parents, and administrators. The deepest cleavages were between both parents and teachers and teachers and administrators. One parent noted the role that the LSC played in *giving voice to each of these factions: "The council, I see it as a voice speaking out for our students and myself, as a parent, to our staff. A voice that needs to be heard about parents' rights, students' rights, as well as staff rights. Us working together as a family, decision making, concerns about respect and discipline."*

During the process of establishing the LSC, conflicts between teachers and parents arose over two issues. The first conflict involved the council's meeting time. Parents wanted to hold sessions in the evening, because many of them worked during the morning hours. Several teachers balked at this idea, because they would have to travel to and from the building after school hours. After some dispute, it was agreed that the council would meet twice a month, once in the morning and once in the evening.

The second and more divisive conflict emerged when choosing parent members for the council. The school community coordinator had been asked by the principal to select parents. The Building Committee representatives objected, stating that this procedure was improper, and turned to the cluster office for backing. Upon the cluster's suggestion, a ballot to elect parents was circulated. Unfortunately, these steps were taken without informing other council members, causing confusion and bitterness among parents and the school community coordinator, who defensively accused Building representatives of feeling threatened by "strong parents." As our research ended, the council had agreed to temporarily ratify the membership of the original set of parents in order to allow the full council to attend an upcoming cluster-sponsored retreat. The cluster has played a "healing and bonding" role in the school. It sponsored a retreat that the principal described as "an excellent effort. The best thing the cluster's done." He credited the retreat with helping members to develop a common vision.

Nevertheless, concerns remain about the council in particular and decision making in general. These concerns originated from two directions. A teacher council member explained that parents have yet to prove their ability to act as competent decision makers. For others, apprehension about the new governance structure revolved around issues of trust and the credibility of proclamations from "downtown." An SLC Coordinator explained that budget cuts feed fear: "We're given many more opportunities to decide on things, especially where professional development is concerned. But we are definitely not there, yet. There is a definite credibility problem. I have a lot of teachers who have been here 20 years. They get cynical. 'Here we go again. They're not going to listen to us. They are going to do what they want anyway.' And sure enough, I'm sitting there with them all enthusiastic about how we're gonna be block rostered, and I'm cut from the budget. So how do you keep credibility going when there's no real support for what you decide?"

Despite these concerns, a stubborn optimism was observed. Most agreed that the council was well conceived and preferred to see past experiences as building blocks from which the new council could ascend. "I think it is a matter of experience. A lot of time was wasted on semantics, learning things about majority rule. Paralysis through analysis....I think the present council has learned from that."

Assessment

Children Achieving envisions the establishment of a new assessment system that will provide multiple measures of the district's progress toward new performance standards. These measures are expected to include portfolios and performance-based assessments. In 1995-96, the performance measures had not yet been defined, and the only districtwide measure was the SAT9 for reading, mathematics, and science in grades 2, 4, 6, 8, and 11. The SAT9 was administered to the 67 schools in the first six clusters in 1994-95. Some schools were exploring or piloting other measures, such as performance tasks, portfolios, exhibitions, and student work sampling. One cluster was using its own funds to administer the New Standards Reference Examinations in Mathematics.

In the summer of 1995 and into the 1995-96 school year, district leaders engaged in considerable discussion over using the New Standards Project's (NSP) Reference Examinations districtwide. In the end, they declined, because the examinations are costly, do not cover all core subjects, and had not yet established technical adequacy. However, both the NSP exams and the SAT9 are marketed by Harcourt-Brace, and it is likely that they will be linked in the future, permitting an easier transition to the NSP exams if the district decides that they provide better measures.

Concerns about the fit between the state assessment and the new district standards were also expressed. The district is seeking waivers for some portions of the state test that do not appear to match its standards.

The Schools

Most of the schools had "pockets" (single classrooms, teams of teachers, or an entire SLC) in which longer-term efforts to implement innovative approaches to assessment had taken place. In the high schools, teacher experimentation with alternative assessment tended to occur in individual classrooms, although some SLCs had designed a year-end SLC-wide project or exhibition of student work. One example of a pocket of alternative assessment at the elementary level was a school in which the fourth and fifth grades were working on the use of rubrics for assessing writing. At a middle school, one house had made limited use of exhibitions. These schools did not have a critical mass of teachers engaged in shared conversations about teaching, learning, and assessment. As a result, professional development by the TLN and others were taking fragile, early steps toward standards-driven teaching and learning.

Two elementary schools and one middle school, where there had been a focus on assessment for several years, had implemented whole-school innovations. For example, in one elementary school, portfolios traveled with students from grade to grade, and professional development time was allocated for review and discussion of these portfolios. Another school had instituted schoolwide writing prompts and engaged teachers in the collective assessment of student writing. In these schools, *Children Achieving*'s emphasis on accountability with closely linked standards for teaching, learning, and assessment was seen as legitimizing their own visions, providing a "kick in the pants" to those few teachers who offered reluctance or resistance.

School H

The staff of School H was rightfully proud of its work in developing and implementing rubrics, work sampling, thematic units, writing prompts, and group grading. In a near-unanimous vote, teachers had elected to extend each school day in order to allow for a monthly early release. They used this time for school improvement planning, group grading, professional *development, and general meeting time for committees. During one site visit, a tired but enthusiastic first-grade teacher displayed a thick folder of papers representing one student's work. After illustrating the steps the student had undertaken as he learned to subtract, she explained that portfolios gave her "a much better sense of each child's progress than giving an 'A' or an 'F'." The principal explained that 1995-96 presented an opportunity to collect baseline data. Next year, they plan to focus on the writing of persuasive essays.*

Accountability

The district's top management took the first real step toward developing a new accountability system in 1995-96. The Superintendent and Board adopted 30 performance goals for the year, and the pay increases of all central office administrators and cluster leaders for 1996-97 were linked to the achievement of those goals. The Superintendent reported to the Board of Education on the goals' achievement in September of 1996.

Hornbeck proposed to extend the pay-for-performance approach to teachers and principals in the coming years. Following the Kentucky accountability design, student performance targets would be defined for 1996-97 for each school using the SAT9 and other performance indicators, such as attendance. The 1995-96 data would be the baseline for all schools in all 22 clusters. Schools would have two years to reach their targets, and monetary incentives would be linked to their performance. Sanctions such as limited access to pay increases or the reconstitution of a school would be enacted in cases of poor performance. These rewards and sanctions would take effect at the end of the 1997-98 school year. The proposed accountability system raises a number of difficult issues, including some serious equity considerations. The support provided to next 16 clusters will be different from the first six, and the clusters have differential access to external funding.

Summary and Issues for Future Research

The district has made considerable progress in this first year of *Children Achieving*, completing all of the important development and implementation tasks that were planned. At the end of the first year, the first six clusters were operational, the standards were drafted, headway was made in changing school organization and governance, and a new testing system was established. Thus far, *Children Achieving* has developed a solid record of accomplishment. Even more encouraging is the fact that many participants at all levels think that the new cluster organization is working.

Next year, however, promises to be more difficult, as content standards are adopted, 16 new clusters begin their work, and the district moves forward with its new accountability system. These initiatives raise a host of important questions:

- How will teachers respond to the new district standards?
- How will new accountability indicators, such as the SAT9 scores and the standards, affect curriculum and instruction?
- Will the next 16 clusters be able to implement the reforms at the same pace as the original six?

- What difference, if any, will resource differentials have on cluster performance?
- What SLC forms will develop, and how will the standards, as well as the assessment and accountability systems, affect them ?
- What effects will different forms of SLCs have on teachers and students?
- In what areas of decision making will LSCs get involved?
- How will the LSCs' decisions affect the SLCs?
- Most importantly, how will the variation in the rate of implementation, resources, and SLCs affect student performance?

These and other related questions will shape the evaluation research over the next two years.

VI. Building Capacity for Instructional Reform

Providing access to intensive, sustained, and high-quality professional development for administrators, and teachers is one of the ten components of *Children Achieving*. The district is committed to building the infrastructure and the school capacity required to support professional growth and the improvement of practice in classrooms.

To foster and support professional development, the district and its partners have created several new organizations—two within the district and one outside of it. The TLN and the Office of Best Practices are the primary district vehicles for supporting the efforts of school staff to implement the new standards and SLCs, develop or adopt curricula, and improve teaching practice. The external partner, the Philadelphia Education Fund (PEF), is a non-profit education fund supported by public and private grants. PEF is providing a variety of services that support *Children Achieving*, including professional development in support of standards, literacy, development of SLCs, design of new assessment procedures, and leadership development.

The district and the Challenge also have provided substantial financial support for professional development in the six clusters. Over $3.7 million went directly to the schools in the first six clusters to support ten days of professional development for school staff.[8] An additional $1.7 million in Title I funds was available for professional development in 46 eligible cluster schools. The cluster leaders also provided the schools with an additional $384,000 from their own budgets for professional development. The NSF-funded Urban Systemic Initiative trained and supported the work of lead teachers in math and science in each of the 67 schools. Some schools received additional support from the PEF through the Student at the Center and Library Power projects and from the William Penn Foundation for the Arts Empower program. Other schools received support from partnerships with business and civic organizations. The central office and the clusters have aggressively raised external funds to support curriculum development, professional development for teachers, and technology. In sum, a large investment was made in teacher development during 1995-96.

School Professional Development Funds

Decentralization of decision making is an integral component of *Children Achieving*, and a major step in that direction was taken in 1995-96 when individual schools received discretionary funds for professional development. Each of the schools in five of the six clusters received approximately $64 per child for professional development. The exception was Strawberry Mansion, where the amount allocated to the schools ranged from $53 to $100 per child. In addition, 46 of the 67 schools received Title I funds that could also be used for professional development.

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[8] The financial information reported here is taken from the Office of Schools and the Office of Standards, Equity, and Student Services report, *Professional Development Presentation for Cohort One Clusters* (School District of Philadelphia, May 20, 1996).

Table 4. Professional Development Investments and Priorities by Cluster

Cluster	Schools (Title I)	Investment in $1,000s	Reported Areas of Emphasis	Special Initiatives
Audenried	10 (9)	444	Mathematics Standards Performance Tasks Whole Language Thematic Teaching (Star Lab) Algebra for All Use of Technology	Cigna Partnership USI
Chain	11 (0)	721	Use of Standards Whole Language Thematic Teaching Math Standards/Pedagogy Hands on Science Use of Technology	NASDC in 9 Schools Learning Research and Development Center Initiative USI
King	15 (9)	1125	Math Standards Thematic Teaching Alternative Assessment Reading/LA Pedagogy Conflict Resolution Team Building Hands on Science Use of Technology	William Penn Grant School-to-Career Program Students at the Center Grant (PEF) USI
Olney	12 (10)	1302	Use of Performance Tasks Standards-Based Teaching Coalition of Essential Schools Content Study Groups Developmentally Appropriate Practice in K-1	IBM Reinventing Education Grant Coalition for Essential Schools USI
Strawberry Mansion	8 (8)	899	Use of Performance Tasks Student Portfolios Standards in Content Areas Developmentally Appropriate Practice in K-1 Literature across the Curriculum Best Practices in Teaching	NASDC in 8 Schools School-to-Career Program USI
West Philadelphia	11 (10)	1056	Team-Building Small Learning Communities Inter-disciplinary Teaching Cooperative Learning Alternative Assessment	William Penn Grant Penn-Merck Collaborative USI West Philadelphia Compact (PEF)

Comprehensive data on the use of these funds are not yet available. Data reported by the six clusters to the central office are displayed in Table 4. They provide some sense of the range of professional development activities in the schools, although many schools supported a much greater range of activities than those shown in the table. There was strong emphasis on the use of standards and on standards-based instruction. There also was considerable emphasis on helping teachers to prepare their students for the SAT9. Mathematics, reading, writing, and science received heavy attention, as did the use of alternative assessment procedures. Almost all schools provided some training in the use of technology, while some schools provided professional development geared towards implementing SLCs and school councils.

The process of deciding how these professional development funds would be used varied somewhat from cluster to cluster and from school to school. In some clusters, priorities for professional development were determined through a collective process involving the cluster leader, principals, and TLN coordinators. In others, the decisions were made in the schools. In some schools, discretionary professional development funds sponsored teachers' attendance at conferences or workshops on particular topics and paid for substitute services while they were away. In one school, the money was simply divided up evenly among all of the teachers; each received a $700 stipend to spend as he or she saw fit.

However the funds were used, the opportunity for teachers to plan professional development in the schools and to decide how to spend the money was taken as evidence that district leadership was serious about its decentralization plans. Regardless of their opinion of *Children Achieving*, teachers and administrators felt respected professionally, had a sense of empowerment, and gained a boost in morale, because they were able to make their own choices about professional development. The ability to obtain and fund substitute service meant that programs were not disrupted and the costs did not burden the school. In addition, those who attended outside conferences and workshops provided turn-around training, which constituted much of the school-level staff development reported in our interviews.

While placing decisions about professional development in the hands of school staff strengthened their sense of professionalism, it also generated some controversy. The district was taken by surprise when the press reported that 155 teachers, principals, and administrators were attending the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's conference in New Orleans. *The Daily News* publicly reported the total costs of these trips and suggested that these teachers might be taking vacations rather than attending meetings. In response to the publicity, the district issued a new policy prohibiting more than two school staff members from attending any one meeting or conference at the same time. This policy immediately created problems for clusters in which several staff members were participating in various activities as teams. When one of the TLN coordinators complained to the central office, she was granted an exemption to the "two-person rule," but was left confused about when and how it should be applied. On its face, the rule inhibits efforts to build teams or to encourage schools to work together on common improvement initiatives. Several of the cluster leaders expressed a desire to exert more influence over the use of professional development money allotted to schools, arguing that "someone needs to determine the needs of the organization as a whole," and that "schools don't have enough objectivity" to determine how the money should best be spent. Some of them felt that the resources should be more focused on schoolwide initiatives. They also argued that, because schools had so many opportunities, it often took them too long to decide how to spend it. School staff, on the other hand, complained about being asked to make decisions about spending professional development funds at the last minute, without sufficient time for reasoned consideration.

Based on our interviews with cluster and school staff, we offer the following observations. When schools or its SLCs had, or were developing, a focus for their instructional improvement efforts, it was more likely that there was also focus and continuity in professional development. Where there was no such focus, and no process underway to develop one, professional development activities typically covered a broader range of topics and were more fragmented and personalized.

The Teaching and Learning Network

The TLN is the primary district mechanism for improving curriculum and instruction in the schools, fostering school improvement initiatives, and supporting instructional change. The TLN was established in the spring of 1995 to provide support and staff development activities in the first six clusters to help staff meet the challenges of *Children Achieving*. In 1995-96, the TLN consisted of six coordinators (one in each cluster) and 27 facilitators (four to six in each cluster), most of whom were former teachers and classroom support personnel. TLN members outside of this core group included school support staff, such as reading teachers, department heads, SLC coordinators, and instructional support teachers. The work of the TLN was sometimes conducted by a single facilitator and sometimes by teams of two to five members. The Network's activities have taken many forms, including working with individual teachers, consulting with school committees, and conducting formal training with large groups.

Greater Philadelphia First reported that the TLN spent approximately $14 million in Children Achieving Challenge funds this past year to improve teaching and learning. The district spent another $6.4 million, for a total of more than $20 million. These resources were allocated as follows:

- $1.5 million was spent on books and libraries in the first six clusters and other racially-isolated schools;
- $1.7 million was spent to establish "accommodation rooms" in elementary schools for children who are disruptive in class;
- $3.7 million was spent for teacher training and professional development in the 67 schools in the first six clusters;
- $8.2 million was spent for more computers, improved technology and access to computer networks, and the integration of the use of technology in classrooms;
- $1 million was spent on developing SLCs;
- $200,000 was spent on leadership development in the SLCs;
- $2 million was spent on the implementation of standards; and

- $2.1 million was spent on salaries and benefits for TLN personnel.

The main objective of the TLN is to provide support to teachers as they redesign curricula and revise pedagogy and assessment procedures in accordance with the emerging district standards. The Teaching and Learning Workplan laid out five additional goals for the TLN:

- to ensure that all students and teachers are members of fully functioning SLCs;

- to ensure that all teachers, SLCs, schools, and clusters design their intensive, ongoing professional development with the foundation and knowledge of developmental issues and instructional practices appropriate for all students and with the aim of ensuring success for all students;

- to restructure systemwide support for teaching and leaning, so that it includes a framework of standards and policies to ensure equity and accountability, dissemination of maximum knowledge about best practice, support for inquiry, and effective brokering of expertise;

- to enhance school resources to provide additional elements vital to teaching and learning and SLCs; and

- to build an information infrastructure around teaching and learning.

In addition to these ambitious systemwide goals, the TLN is also responsible for assisting individual schools in meeting their own professional development needs.

To begin this process, TLN staff met with staff in the 67 schools in the first six clusters in the fall of 1995. Working with the TLN staff, each school then developed an action plan that identified areas where assistance was needed. TLN staff revisit these schools and revise these plans as the needs of the schools change. Given the district's emphasis on creating SLCs and developing standards-based curricula, the TLN coordinators indicated that much of their work focused on these areas in the first year.

The biggest challenge facing the TLN in 1995-96 was gaining acceptance in the schools. They indicated that many teachers were initially skeptical and resistant, questioning how the TLN staff could possibly help them in their classrooms. It was anticipated that high school staff would be particularly difficult to convince, because many of the TLN coordinators have K-8 backgrounds; and that older, more experienced teachers would be more resistant. However, a recent survey conducted by the Office of Accountability and Assessment at the central office found that school staff at all levels have begun to see the TLN as a valued resource and as an influence on their practice.

In order to find out how teachers were reacting to the TLN, district research staff interviewed a sample of teachers in the first six clusters. Two groups of teachers were randomly selected to be interviewed: (1) those who reported being served by the TLN; and (2) those who reported not being served by the TLN. A total of 186 teachers were interviewed in 40 of the 67 cluster schools. Of the 186, 136 reported being served by the TLN.

Teachers who had been served by the TLN were asked to list the activities in which they had participated, rate its services, indicate if they used what they had learned in their classrooms, and report if the experience had led to better communication in their school. The teachers not served by the TLN were asked if they had heard of it, if they had received materials from it, and whether or not they thought they would benefit from the services it provided.

Overall, the survey results indicated that teachers in these schools felt positively about the contributions of the TLN. Almost 90 percent of teachers served by the TLN responded that they found the services either helpful or very helpful. Contrary to expectation, there was little difference among elementary, middle, and high school respondents or among teachers with different amounts of experience. Most encouraging was the fact that 75 percent of the teachers who had received services from the TLN indicated that they were applying these skills in their classrooms. Again, there was little variation by level taught or by years of teaching experience. Finally, 80 percent of the teachers not yet served by the TLN reported they believed its services would be beneficial.

In addition to the teacher survey, the Office of Accountability and Assessment also spoke with 40 principals about the TLN. Almost 80 percent reported that they found its services to be helpful or very helpful.

The School Perspective

What did the teachers interviewed by the evaluation team think about the TLN? How had their professional development changed? What use were they making of its services? Generally, our findings are consistent with those from the district study.

Staff members in most of the schools considered the TLN to be a valuable resource. TLN staff had offered training in areas such as alternative assessment, standards, the new testing program, cooperative learning, team building, and implementing SLCs. Some schools also requested that TLN staff work with specific teachers, particularly new or "weak" teachers. TLN staff also assisted local teacher leaders/administrators in planning retreats and meetings and responded to special requests to assist with school-improvement planning. School staff considered training in the new forms of assessment to be particularly useful and instructive.

Although most school staff valued the TLN, there were some schools in which the staff maintained a distance from it or were skeptical about them. In one reform-oriented school with exceptionally strong local teacher leadership and an ongoing staff development program, few school-level participants saw the TLN as valuable, and, indeed, its influence was not visible in the school. "I don't really see their value," was a refrain echoed by its staff as well as its principal. Most of the training on standards, assessment, and classroom practice in the school had been provided by members of their staff who were involved in the standards writing effort, USI, or local teacher curriculum/discipline-based networks. In another school with a history of reform initiatives a teacher noted, "We look inside for expertise first."

In other sites, especially in the high schools, some staff questioned the appropriateness of TLN facilitator/coordinator expertise. They saw TLN staff as being elementary- and middle school-trained, and they questioned the applicability of their knowledge and approach to the high school level, where teachers believe they are more "discipline" based. For example, one high school SLC coordinator commented on how his staff received the TLN staff: "Teaching and Learning Network? People are cynical because they're not high school. They see enthusiasm, creativity, child-centered...but think 'that's for middle school.'" One of the high school principals observed, "Staff are going to have to learn to respect generalists. It's a paradigm shift."

Even if school staff members acknowledged the expertise of the TLN staff, they did not always think what was offered was appropriate for their schools. As designers of their own programs, they felt that they knew what they needed and preferred to pick and choose professional development programs to "complement" what they were already doing. They wanted choice, and when the TLN met their needs, they were willing to use it. If not, they were prepared to go elsewhere for services. For example, in the summer of 1995, one of the reform-oriented elementary schools sent staff to Pittsburgh to observe work sampling, where they consulted with the Pittsburgh school staff on other avenues of professional development and support for teaching approaches. The principal of a strong middle school commented, "When we need experts, we know where we want to go."

Office of Best Practices

The Office of Best Practices was created in the spring of 1995 to help schools identify highly effective practices and materials. Its mission is to help schools and SLCs strengthen links between school plans, purchases of instructional materials and programs and professional development; and the district's new academic standards; and research about instruction and assessment. Ultimate goals are for the office to improve the quality of the information about programs and materials available in the school district and to provide models of exemplary practice that are tied to evidence of improved student achievement. The rationale for providing this service is that it will save schools and SLCs time and energy in their searches for high-quality material. It will also eliminate some of the guess-work involved in such decisions.

The Office of Best Practices is developing a database of promising work already being implemented within the district, along with information on effective practices from across the nation. Teachers will be able to access the information via the Internet. The system is already on-line, and, by the start of the 1996-97 school year, every teacher in the school district should have the capacity to call up the information.

In addition to this database, the Office of Best Practices is disseminating information via Effective Practice Fairs. In late January of 1996, a fair on "Small Learning Communities and Programs that Support Them" was held at Edison High School. It consisted of 105 workshops and presentations conducted by district staff. Another fair was held in March to showcase high-quality practices and products from outside the district. It allowed teachers to inspect the products of 125 different vendors.

Although the Office of Best Practices has already begun to disseminate information, district officials admit that they are not yet ready to identify what constitutes "blue ribbon" practice. In fact, according to one official, simply deciding that the district should identify some teaching practices in this way was a struggle. Many teachers and administrators continue to be skeptical about developing criteria for rating the relative effectiveness of one practice over another, given the number of mitigating circumstances in classrooms. However, district officials are determined to "push ahead." The goals for next year are to establish an explicit set of standards for the identification of "blue ribbon" practices and to become a more effective filter for the products and programs entering the system. At the present time, there are no standards for exclusion. At the two Effective Practices Fairs conducted this past year, any vendor who paid the registration fee was allowed to display materials.

The Philadelphia Education Fund

The Philadelphia Education Fund (PEF) is an external partner in the efforts of the district and the Challenge to improve teaching and learning in Philadelphia. A non-profit technical assistance organization, PEF is supported by grants from The Pew Charitable Trusts, the DeWitt-Wallace Foundation, the William Penn Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Education, among other funders. It is one of the organizations eligible to receive matching funds for the Annenberg Challenge grant, and the Pew grant is part of that match. A significant portion of PEF's activities focus on improving schools and enhancing student achievement; its other focus is collaborating with the district on the design and implementation of *Children Achieving*. The Pew grant has supported collaborative work with the district in support of the initiative, and other PEF grants such as Library Power and Students at the Center, both funded by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund are providing direct support to the schools. The North Philadelphia Compact, another PEF initiative, supports student services by building partnerships among higher education institutions, community agencies, and school staff. PEF also administers other foundation-supported projects in the arts.

Although an outgrowth of two respected school reform initiatives—the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative and PATHS/PRISM—PEF is a new organization and is forging a new, more collaborative relationship with the district. Its new role is not yet well understood by all parties. Its staff view their work as stimulating and supporting improvements in teaching and learning by providing high quality technical assistance and building professional networks. But the PFT staff believe that PEF was created to avoid public scrutiny of the use of Annenberg funds. However, the Annenberg funds are the responsibility of the Children Achieving Challenge. In addition, Commonwealth Court Judge Doris Smith was concerned about PEF's role, questioning whether a private organization should be taking a leadership role in developing standards for Philadelphia (see Section IV).

PEF's activities have been consistent with its mission of providing high quality technical assistance. PEF did work closely with the Challenge and the district through the workplan process, playing a leadership role in the development of the Standards and Assessment Workplan and a lesser role in the Teaching and Learning Workplan. PEF staff collaborated closely with the Office of Standards, Equity, and Student Services (OSESS) on the development of the content standards, a process which involved central office staff, administrators, teachers, and parents. Both PEF and district staff reported that this was a successful collaboration. The draft content standards were completed, but PEF's work was slowed in April by the Commonwealth Court order forbidding the district to delegate such tasks to PEF (See Section IV). Following a district appeal of this order, the collaboration between the district and PEF has continued.

The collaboration itself has not been without problems. PEF has not yet established effective working relationships with the Office of Schools (OS) and in particular with the TLN. In sharp contrast to its strong and productive relationship with OSESS, these relationships are described by both sides as strained. PEF staff point out that all parties were working together in the summer of 1995, but once the new district organization took hold in the fall, the collaboration fell apart. As a consequence, PEF played almost no role in helping schools in the first six clusters set their professional development priorities or in assisting cluster leaders and TLN coordinators to think about approaches to teacher development and school improvement.

Building effective working relationships is critical if PEF's resources are to be used to develop the district's capacity for instructional improvement. Respondents offered a variety of explanations for the problems that have beset these relationships. Some OS staff believed that PEF was spending "their money." This misunderstanding arose from events that occurred in 1995. At that time the Office of Schools was just being formed and the district turned to PEF to help prepare schools for the implementation of *Children Achieving*. To bridge a time gap in PEF's funding in the summer of 1995 until the arrival of the Pew money, the district took $2.1 million from the Office of Schools and transferred it to PEF to run programs in collaboration with it. The funds were supposed to be reimbursed to the district by the Challenge, but the incident created tensions between PEF and the Office of Schools. This history has obstructed cooperation between PEF and OS.

Another part of the problem may be that OS and TLN staff have simply been too over-burdened to collaborate with any external group. Turf issues also adds to the problem—both the TLN and PEF staffs claim expertise in professional development. The TLN is new and has to establish its legitimacy, and TLN staff want to "own the work." PEF staff want their expertise and contributions to be recognized. Some district staff complain about PEF's attitude toward them. "They feel that they are experts. They think we are just bureaucrats, and they do not see us as equals." Conversely, PEF staff feel that their expertise has not been used effectively.

At the same time, PEF staff believe that these problems are being solved. They feel that the release of the standards will provide the basis for cooperation in the future and they are working to forge stronger links with TLN and cluster staff.

Other External Funding

In addition to district support for professional development, the clusters and their schools were the recipients of other external resources.

Urban Systemic Initiative

Philadelphia is one of several cities that have received Urban Systemic Initiative (USI) grants from the National Science Foundation. The $15 million, five-year grant is intended to improve instruction in science, mathematics, and technology. The USI is providing professional development and materials for TLN coordinators and facilitators and for teachers. The USI trained two teachers from each of the 67 schools to serve as lead teachers for math and science and provided twenty hours of training to five teachers from each school.

The William Penn Foundation

The West Philadelphia and Martin Luther King clusters are slated to receive $13.8 million from the William Penn Foundation for education reform. The grant will allow each of the 27 schools to provide three extra hours of instruction a week to the most at-risk students and to stay open three hours longer each day for community-based activities. The money will also pay for seven additional hours of professional development each year per teacher, provide an extra $30 per student for books and $40 for computers, and pay for a teacher-facilitator in each school to help teachers improve instructional practice. A condition of the grant prevents the school district from reducing the operating budgets of the two clusters.

The IBM Foundation

The school district and IBM have formed a partnership to use technology as an integral component in designing professional development. The Continuous Practice Improvement (CPI) model will be implemented over the next year. Technology will be used to design new instructional approaches and to network teachers and administrators. The $2 million grant will be focused on the Olney Cluster, and it will involve Barton Elementary, Central East Middle School, and Olney High School. These schools initially will receive computer hardware, software, courseware, and training, and one classroom in each school will be outfitted with 6 computers.

School-to-Career Pilot

Four years ago, the School District of Philadelphia initiated a school-to-career/work-based learning program that originally served only 12 students. The program has since expanded to include cohorts in 16 comprehensive high schools with 2,000 students involved in a multitude of career pathways. The School-to-Career Workplan developed for *Children Achieving* expands on these efforts. It calls for professional development, building a K-8 sequence for school-to-career transition, providing work-based learning experiences for all high school students, using technology to support the system, developing Next Step Centers to provide information on education and training to students, and strengthening external partnerships. During the 1996-97 school year, School-to-Career staff will be working intensively with the Kensington, Martin Luther King, and Strawberry Mansion clusters to implement the major components of the school-to-career system. Each subsequent year, the district and its partners plan to implement the full sequence of school-to-career programs in four to five additional clusters. The clusters will be selected on a voluntary basis.

The budget for the School-to-Career Workplan was $2 million in 1995-96; it will total $4.4 million in 1996-97. This sum includes funds from the Office of Education for Employment, grants received by the district, grants received by the Children Achieving Challenge, corporate contributions, and unrestricted Children Achieving Challenge funds.

Library Power

Library Power is an initiative of the DeWitt Wallace-Readers' Digest Fund, which supports programs in 20 sites around the country. PEF secured a grant for Philadelphia. Its goal is to create library programs that integrate classroom curricula; serve the needs of students, teachers, and parents; and function as a model for child-centered interdisciplinary teaching and learning. The project, a joint effort between PEF and the school district, enables schools to buy books, software, and furniture for their libraries. It also provides professional development for teams from the Library Power schools. At the present time, Library Power is supporting these activities in 30 schools, some of which are in the first six clusters.

Students at the Center

The Martin Luther King and Gratz clusters are the beneficiaries of a $3 million grant from the DeWitt-Wallace Foundation. The money will distributed over the next three years to provide teacher and parent training activities in the areas of computer science, mathematics, science, writing, and leadership. PEF, Beaver College, the Franklin Institute, and the Philadelphia Writing Project will be working with the two clusters.

Arts Empower

Since 1992, the William Penn Foundation has collaborated with PEF (PATHS/PRISM) on the development and support of an innovative, interdisciplinary arts program in 16 Philadelphia public schools. Intended to spearhead school renewal, Arts Empower now provides intensive ongoing professional development for teams of teachers at 12 schools, representing different disciplines, around arts-integrated teaching and learning and school reform.

Issues and Questions for Future Research

Data on how these significant investments have affected teaching and learning are not yet available. Future research will address this question, but, to answer it intelligently and to contribute to improved decision making, other questions must also be posed. What are the patterns of use for professional development funds? How are these decisions made? Where do school staff look for information and assistance? To what degree are there focused, sustained professional development programs in the schools? How are these priorities determined? What contributes to, or obstructs, developing a focus within a school or SLC? How do staff assess the quality of professional development options? And, how does the support infrastructure affect the way these issues are addressed and resolved? The evaluation team will look for evidence by examining the co-variation among professional development approaches, responses to next fall's teacher survey about changes in teaching practice, and outcome indicators. We will also use professional development strategies as one criterion for selecting the schools in which teachers will be observed and interviewed.

Another set of questions will focus on how well the various parts of the system are working together. The Annenberg workplan acknowledges that the success of *Children Achieving* depends on coordinated support from the cluster offices, the TLN, the Office of Best Practices, the Office of Curriculum Support, and PEF. How do the Office of Best Practices and the TLN work together to improve professional development in the school system? At present, the relationship between the two is unclear. TLN coordinators interviewed during this round of fieldwork were generally unaware of the Office of Best Practices' work. It is worth noting that the two units are not in the same department of the central office and that their staff do not routinely meet. Development of a close working relationship between the Office of Schools, particularly the TLN, and PEF is equally critical. These organizational relationships are just being developed and are likely to change over time, so the evaluation team will be monitoring their patterns of interaction.

There is also a need to investigate how priorities are set at the school and cluster level. On what basis do they decide to invest in a particular strategy, curriculum, or program? How does the TLN decide which instructional practices to emphasize? What role does knowledge play in these decisions, and what are its sources? Are these decisions informed by the Office of Best Practices? How are "best practices" determined? Will teachers and schools welcome, resist, or ignore the "filtering" aspect of the Office of Best Practices, given the emphasis on local decision-making in *Children Achieving*?

These questions will be addressed over the next two years, shaping both the teacher survey and the selection of the school sample for intensive fieldwork.

VII. The Family Resource Network

Children Achieving seeks to improve student and family access to community services and support, as well as to coordinate the work of the various agencies that provide these services. Asserting that children who lack health care, food, or shelter or who otherwise face hardship "will not achieve at high levels," the School District of Philadelphia and its partners included the development of the Family Resource Network (FRN) in its proposal to the Annenberg Foundation. This section examines the implementation of the FRN from the central office, cluster, and school perspectives, highlighting areas of progress and issues of concern. As more data become available and the FRN develops and matures, subsequent reports will examine its impact on the provision of student support services in the district.

Background

Public schools in the United States have a long history of providing non-instructional, school-based services to needy students. At the turn of the century, progressives and settlement-house leaders pioneered the development of social supports in schools, resulting in the incorporation of a host of non-teaching professionals, including nurses, counselors, social workers, and psychologists into the traditional academic program.[9] These student-support professionals have become common features in public schools throughout the country. While support for school-based services has waxed and waned over the last 100 years, there is now renewed interest in initiatives to develop and coordinate these services and strengthen the links among schools, the social service system, and other community supports.[10]

With over one-tenth of its 1995 school-level budget devoted to health services, prevention programs, child care, and early childhood programs,[11] the School District of Philadelphia has been no exception to these trends. While counselors, nurses, and psychologists have been working in Philadelphia schools for years, they have been joined more recently by social workers, community advocates, and probation officers. Recent initiatives to provide students with non-academic support have focused on advocacy for children and more comprehensive and integrated service delivery. Prime examples include the creation of the Family Centers, in conjunction with the Mayor's Cabinet on Children and Families, and—with the advent of *Children Achieving*—the FRN.

Family Resource Network: Definition and Goals

To support the academic success of Philadelphia's children, the Superintendent and the Board of Education have advocated the development of the FRN, an organization of both district and non-district personnel cooperating to coordinate, lead, and provide prevention-oriented services. The goals of the Network are broad, defined in the "Family Resource Network: Position Paper"[12] in the following way:

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[9] See Tyack, D. 1992. "Health and Social Services in Public Schools: Historical Perspectives." *The Future of Children: School Linked Services*, 2(1), pp. 19-31.

[10] Dryfoos, Joy G. 1994. *Full-service Schools: A Revolution in Health and Social Services for Children, Youth and Families*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

[11] School District of Philadelphia. 1994. 1994-95 Budget Document. Philadelphia, PA: Author.

> Advocacy on behalf of children and families; support for school-based comprehensive student support service teams; outreach to parents, families and communities; and connections to health providers, social service agencies and other family support systems will be the province of the Family Resource Network. The overall goal of the Network is not simply to improve an entire system (an ambitious task in and of itself), but rather to create a system that can continually transform itself according to the needs of its constituents.

The same document cites the FRN's "primary goal" as serving

> ...as a mechanism through which public and private agencies, acting in concert, can set directions, develop and redirect resources around common goals, integrate service providers' efforts, and monitor their own success.

This ambitious vision for the FRN is based on the idea that children "who are unhealthy, hungry, abused, ill-housed, or ill-clothed will have difficulty achieving at high levels."[13] In support of learning, the FRN, led by district personnel but including outside partners, is intended to coordinate and create access to local social service and community agencies. To take on this formidable task, the "Position Paper" calls for the creation of a "new service coordination and systems transformation position," the FRN coordinator.

The FRN coordinator is expected to act as a bridge between schools and external partners and between the schools and the central office. Operating at the cluster level, coordinators are charged with eliminating family's barriers to accessing and utilizing services. They also are expected to lead school-based student support personnel, including at the very least "the school nurses and counselors in the cluster, other school-based staff with responsibility for community linkage, and the volunteer coordinator."[14] How the coordinators will undertake these responsibilities is not specifically described. The FRN coordinators in the first six clusters have defined their roles to include the organization of professional development opportunities, which bring external partners and school staff together; the coordination of after-school and community school programs; the creation of partnerships with city and community agencies; and the facilitation of meetings with cluster and school-based student support teams, among other activities.

Assessing whether such a wide-ranging mission has been accomplished is problematic. In this report, emphasis is placed on how staff at all levels of the district understood the FRN, what obstacles it faced, and what supports it utilized during this early period of its development. Questions addressed include:

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[12] School District of Philadelphia, 1995. Philadelphia, PA: Author.

[13] School District of Philadelphia, 1995. Family Resource Network: Position Paper. Philadelphia, PA: Author.

[14] School District of Philadelphia, 1995. Family Resource Network: Position Paper. Philadelphia, PA: Author.

- Has the FRN been implemented in the pilot clusters, and to what extent?

- Is the role of the FRN understood by school district staff at all levels—school, cluster, and central administration?

- What issues or obstacles have been encountered during implementation, how have they varied in different clusters, and how have they been addressed?

- What factors—political, managerial, community, capacity, resource, and ownership—are affecting implementation?

The data used to answer these questions were obtained through interviews with district staff at the central office, cluster, and school levels; observation of FRN-sponsored activities; informal discussion with parents, community organizers, and school staff attending FRN-sponsored events; and analysis of published and internal district documents, newsletters, and announcements. Future reports will utilize this and additional information to assess the effects of the FRN, particularly its impact on access to and coordination of services for children and their families.

Is the Family Resource Network Operational?

The answer to this question is not as obvious as one might think. As one cluster staff member noted about the district in general, "The current system hasn't necessarily changed just because the clusters have come in." The same can be said about the FRN. However, many people have worked energetically to launch the FRN: new staff members have been hired, responsibilities have been restructured, and activities have been developed to link schools with the broader community. The FRN has been created and is operating in the first six pilot clusters. The following sections will describe in greater detail the role of the FRN, as seen from two different perspectives, as well as the supports and obstacles it has encountered in its first year of operation.

What is the Role of the FRN?

How district personnel perceive the role of the FRN is an important indicator of how effectively the *Children Achieving* vision has been translated from the central office to the field. Ideally, staff at the cluster, school, and central office levels would share, to a considerable degree, a common understanding of the primary components and goals of the FRN. Currently, the cluster and central office levels seem to have similar concepts of the FRN, but school staff are still struggling to understand *Children Achieving*'s new approach to student support services.

The Central Office and Cluster Perspectives

Both cluster and central office staff referred to the FRN as a "change agent" and discussed the exciting possibilities of its effect on system transformation. However, despite their shared optimism, they emphasized different aspects of the reform when describing how it operated in practice. Central office personnel focused on its potential for achieving greater efficiency in the provision of social services, while the coordinators talked mostly about creating full-service schools, so that schools become the focal points of their communities. While these ideas are not inherently incompatible, they do reflect different priorities and expectations for the FRN at different levels of the system.

The efficiency model of the FRN was voiced most strongly at the central office level:

> We're [the School District of Philadelphia] not a great health or social services delivery system, and we shouldn't try to be: that's someone else's job. We're not good at it, we're not trained or set up to do it. We should care about those things, but other agencies specialize in delivering those services, so we shouldn't... We need to let go of the things that are not in our mission and relieve the instructional people of the burden of providing social services best provided by another professional.

Coordinators, on the other hand, never mentioned shifting responsibilities from district personnel to outside agencies. On the contrary, their efforts focused on shoring up, through in-service training and consultations, the social services currently being provided by district employees. One FRN coordinator mentioned that their cluster's focus was on school-based staff. The coordinator was reluctant to invite "outsiders" into the schools until the schools did "a lot of cleaning up [themselves]."

FRN coordinators emphasized a comprehensive view of education as one of a spectrum of social services. Because "Education is not just for K-12. Education is from birth 'til death," they wanted to create FRN-transformed schools that

> people in the community will look up at and say '[Cluster high school] is a wonderful high school. They offer services during the day, and I can go up there...' You're really utilizing that building. You're milking it for everything you possibly can.

Each coordinator emphasized that schools would be open longer hours, be accessible to the community, and be inclusive of all its members, not just students and their families.

> How can I build the perfect world? You can't but you can try. That's what the Family Resource Network is out there doing. Trying to build the perfect marriage with community and school, parents, students, senior citizens. [We're trying to] create public ownership of schools, where schools will be open year-round and have a larger adult education and life-skills component, including parenting education, [etc.].

While this vision is not necessarily incompatible with the efficiency goals of the central office, it certainly represents a different focus.

The School Perspective

Central office and cluster-level FRN staff emphasized different aspects of the Network, but some personnel at the school level are hard-pressed to describe it at all. Although the interviews revealed how the FRN was working in schools, some school staff members were not aware of the FRN at all. Others who had heard about it could not pinpoint its function or identify the activities it had sponsored in their schools. It seems that little information about the FRN had reached school-level staff, even those who work in positions considered part of the FRN. As a consequence some greeted questions about it with blank stares, apparently completely uninformed about the newest student-support initiative.

The low visibility of the FRN in the schools is understandable, since much of its work happens outside school walls or only with a small group of people within each school (e.g., the student support teams). However, we also talked to counselors and others involved directly in student support who were not aware of the FRN or its role. When asked about how the FRN was functioning in her school, one counselor said, "That information has not trickled down to me." Central office staff attributed this ignorance to problems of name-recognition (the FRN is often confused with the Family Centers) and the inability to observe a system as it changes. "Much of what the FRNs do is intangible... [T]he FRN is not an office, it is a philosophy, a conceptual holding cell."

While many staff members had limited awareness of the FRN—or at least could not attribute any particular function to it—those who did know about it were almost universally enthusiastic. In one high school, an SLC coordinator noted that the FRN coordinator had helped her link with a local hospital to establish a mentoring program. Some school staff members gave the clusters and the FRN credit for organizing "community days" or "cluster pride" days which opened schools to the community and informed community members about programs and opportunities at the schools, especially the high schools.

In a few schools, student support staff specifically mentioned that they had learned about resources available in the community through interaction with the FRN coordinator. An ESOL teacher at a middle school said, "It has taken the pressure off where we can find resources for support for the community." In other settings, staff mentioned a mapping activity the FRN is carrying out with students as a way of orienting students and staff to assets and institutions in their communities.

Almost half of the schools in our sample had established after-school or weekend community school programs funded through the cluster's FRN. In most cases, these schools had received assistance in setting up and coordinating the programs. Principals were particularly pleased about having funds available to develop community involvement programs. All but one of the schools considered the assistance of the cluster office invaluable in launching these efforts. In one case, the response from the community was so overwhelming that some classes filled up almost immediately. Classes offered in these community schools included computer instruction, exercise, personal finance, and parenting, among others.

The amount of activity spurred by the FRN is impressive, and more staff members will certainly learn about its work as these programs continue. However, FRN staff are receiving little guidance as they attempt to implement the somewhat ambiguous goals of the Family Resource Network. The broad goals described in "vision documents" allow for wide variation in interpreting the FRN's mission, confounding efforts of FRN staff to build understanding and support among school staff. While diversity can spur innovation, it can also hamper a fledgling initiative trying to create an identity for itself. Specific implementation obstacles are described in greater detail below.

Implementation Obstacles

As noted above, one of the primary stumbling blocks for the FRN is the ambiguity of its mission. In the abstract, the mission seems clear: provide more comprehensive services to students and families by using community support systems more effectively. However, putting this vision into practice can be puzzling.

The role of central office staff assigned to the FRN is an area of particular confusion. As might be expected, central office personnel were the most articulate on this topic: "The role of the district is to take advantage of economies of scale and leverage, and to make the necessary policy changes. Schools have to tell us what the barriers are and then we create the policies that will eliminate those barriers." However, FRN coordinators did not describe the central office role in this manner. One asked with frustration, "I'm lost about 21st Street. What are they supposed to do?" While most felt "supported" by central office staff, none of the coordinators were certain about their "boss's" role. They also felt that the central office had failed in one area especially: advanced communication with school-level FRN members.

When the FRN was developed, FRN coordinators complain, there was little communication or consultation with school-based staff. While nurses, counselors, and psychologists are considered key elements of the FRN, communication between the central office and the schools was so limited that most were left confused about the role of the FRN and of the FRN coordinators in particular. Many student support professionals initially resented the coordinators, because they were threatened by the changes occurring throughout the district. Some feared for their jobs. Many also thought that the coordinators were their new supervisors—and simply represented an additional layer of bureaucracy. One coordinator was particularly critical of the central office's communication efforts:

> No time was spent in informing [the members of the FRN] about [the FRN] and even less time was put into re-training. The FRN is a whole new philosophy....Collaboration is new, the counselor talking to the nurse is new, follow-up is new. Getting people to know that this child does not live in fragments is new. You can't just tell them 'you're part of this team' and then expect them to feel it.

Another coordinator added later, "Any bridges we have, we built."

Universally, the coordinators lamented the lack of central office effort to obtain buy-in from essential personnel. They felt that the lack of attention to this task had made their job much harder and that they had spent considerable amounts of time trying to eliminate misconceptions as a consequence. Encouragingly, most coordinators felt they had made progress in fostering better relationships with and between school-level staff during their first year on the job.

The lack of communication exacerbated another obstacle the FRN faces: the lack of trust district personnel have for non-educators. An FRN coordinator said, "We are outsiders and our skills are not valued or respected." The coordinators characterized their job as "all about relationships." One coordinator described efforts made to foster the conception of the FRN as "stroking, encouraging, [and] handholding," while another felt that the job is exhausting because it requires coordinators to be "on all the time, trying to get people to buy into a new belief system...talking to people's hearts."

Money is also an issue. However, the primary complaint is not about the lack of money, but the difficulty staff have in spending it. While the coordinators seem to be resigned to the fact that the district budget will be reduced, they are frustrated that they have so little control over the funds that are actually available.

> I have spent over a month trying to get one small purchase approved....Eleven thousand dollars [the coordinator's discretionary spending allotment] is no money to begin with and then you have to jump through hoops to spend it.

The coordinators expressed annoyance that the responsibility for services has been decentralized, but that the budget continues to be centralized.

Another dilemma the FRN faces directly conflicts with its goals for systemic transformation. In an effort to produce "cross-system accountability," the FRN coordinators report to both the cluster leader and the Executive Director of the FRN.

> It was arranged this way because we felt if the coordinators only reported to the cluster leaders we would just have individual successes instead of systemwide success....People need to realize that they are not just accountable for their piece of the pie.

Although the intention was to structure a new organization that would promote collaboration and a broader form of accountability, the employees, at all levels, were confused by the new structure. Staff, particularly those at the cluster level, expressed confusion about how to work in a system that is not hierarchical. Coordinators felt "pulled in different directions" and cluster leaders had difficulty directing someone who works for them and for someone else as well.

Every new initiative faces obstacles: the true test of an organization is how it reacts to them and deals with their consequences. Over the next two years of this evaluation, efforts will be made to examine whether and how these obstacles have been overcome.

Supports

While there have been obstacles to implementing the FRN, a strong foundation is being laid upon which to build more comprehensive student and family support services. One of the most positive and apparent assets is the emphasis on communication among the coordinators, both within and across levels, particularly between clusters and between clusters and the central office.

The camaraderie among FRN coordinators contributes to their effective communication. They are a tight-knit group. They, like many of the people we encountered in the district who have been involved in the reforms, have developed a strong bond in an "us against the world" style to face the critics and detractors of *Children Achieving*. Their shared ideas about the role of the FRN and their similar visions about schools sustain them. The coordinators also plan joint events and share their expertise regularly. They value meeting as a group and do so every other week to share ideas, concerns, and frustrations. They also attend bi-weekly meetings with central office staff.

The central office staff struggled to make the hiring process for the FRN coordinators more flexible, the effort paid off: a highly motivated group of FRN coordinators was selected who are willing to take initiative and develop new projects. They have been incredibly energetic about developing programs and projects that support professionals within the schools and link education to the wider community.

The coordinators also worked hard to learn about their clusters' schools and the surrounding community, and new connections to local agencies are beginning to take shape. One coordinator is working with her local Congressperson on initiatives to connect school and work, and others have been active in developing community school programs and recruiting local religious institutions for involvement in after-school projects. The myriad activities developed largely by, or with the assistance of, FRN staff cannot be cataloged here, but they represent an impressive beginning.

Most of the schools in our sample took advantage of FRN resources. While there were two schools (a high school and elementary school) in which the FRN and its resources remained largely invisible, the other nine schools had funded some programs through the FRN. They were using FRN funds in three major ways: for trips or programs for students, programs for parents, and the purchase of additional professional staffing for community-school teams.

Some of these efforts motivated broader coordination with city and other external agencies. For example, in May of 1996, FRN coordinators and central office staff held a day-long meeting with representatives of the Philadelphia Department of Human Services. Approximately 40 people attended this meeting, in which organizational information was exchanged, roles of the FRN and the different DHS offices were described, and opportunities and obstacles for collaboration were discussed. As this evaluation continues, efforts will be made to observe further the relationship between the district and important partner agencies.

Summary and Research Issues

This preliminary investigation, focusing primarily on district and cluster staff roles and school-level activities, illustrates the tradeoffs inherent in the FRN's ambitious and broad mission. While there is enthusiasm for the broad goals of the initiative, there is no recipe for its implementation. Some staff members are uncertain about how to proceed, while others, particularly school staff, remain unclear about what the FRN is supposed to do.

Communication remains, a key issue. Many of the school-based staff were not informed about the changes being made in student support services, creating resistance and confusion when the cluster-level staff arrived and tried to collaborate with them. Other aspects of the new organizational structure, particularly dual reporting, have created confusion, as staff attempt to understand their responsibilities, assume roles that are not fully defined and fit into new accountability systems.

Nevertheless, the FRN was operational in six clusters by the end of the 1995-96 school year and had launched initiatives in most of the 67 schools in those clusters. There is a strong and committed group of FRN staff at the cluster and central office levels, and informed school-level staff have been generally supportive of their efforts. Central office staff have recruited and hired a motivated and energetic cluster-level group, and efforts such as the 1996 Summer Institute should help to capitalize on these assets.

Clearly, with goals as broad and ambitious as those described in the Action Design and "Position Paper," the FRN will not be functioning as intended for some time. For example, a primary goal only briefly addressed in this report, is to bring a host of community resources into the schools. As this evaluation continues, the impact the FRN is having on the lives of the Philadelphia students and their families will be assessed. We will assess its capacity for creating school-linked collaborative services, the level of service coordination with external agencies, communication with both internal and external support professionals, and its impact on access to health and social services.

VIII. Benefits of *Children Achieving* and Factors Affecting the Pace of Reform

The evaluation team's initial data collection has focused on the implementation of the cluster organization and new support structures and on the response of school staffs to these initiatives. How are the schools benefiting from these changes, and which schools are benefiting the most? Based on the perceptions of school staff, contributions fall into *Children Achieving's* three broad categories: the cluster structure; professional development and other new resources; and new district values that stimulate and support reform. These contributions to school capacity improving instruction are discussed in this section.

Other important questions relating to the characteristics of reform-oriented schools are also discussed in this section. Which schools are taking greatest advantage of the benefits of *Children Achieving*? Do they have characteristics that set them apart from other schools? The analysis identifies aspects of schools that appear to facilitate or inhibit their staff's capacity to utilize the resources and opportunities offered by *Children Achieving*. The literature on organizational effectiveness and job performance suggests four sets of variables as being salient in this regard: the intellectual ability, knowledge, and skills of teachers and other staff; the quality and quantity of the resources available for teaching, including staffing levels, instructional time, equipment and materials, and class sizes; the philosophy and organization of instruction; and the social relationships and professional culture in the schools.[15] In this initial analysis of school responses to *Children Achieving*, we focus on how the latter two sets of variables, the philosophy and organization of instruction and the professional culture, are affecting the pace of reform.

The Cluster Organization

The cluster system is a critical aspect of *Children Achieving*'s reforms. The theory of action argues that hands-on leadership and support are important, and the clusters have been structured to bestow greater authority on those working closest to students, while strengthening links between schools for improved articulation and transition. Working with 10 to 15 schools in a K-12 grouping, the clusters are expected to provide more effective leadership and monitoring, better communication, more cooperation and collegiality, higher morale and motivation, support for change in the schools, and, ultimately, improved performance. According to the theory, the creation of the clusters will accelerate the pace of reform in Philadelphia.

The clusters have been given considerable flexibility by the central office in defining their relationships with their schools, setting improvement priorities, and selecting strategies for school change. While they all are focused on implementing standards and mandated structural reforms—SLCs, local school councils, and the FRN—their priorities and strategies vary. For example, Strawberry Mansion has adopted Atlas, one of the NASDC models, in all eight of its schools. The Chain cluster is also supporting the adoption of NASDC models. Olney is committed to the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools and is emphasizing technology due to its grant from IBM. Audenried and West Philadelphia are focused on improving instruction in the primary grades and on increasing student and community use of the schools. King has embraced the devolution philosophy of *Children Achieving* and is focusing its energies on building school capacity to make decisions through the improvement planning process. These varied approaches may, in the long run, produce quite different results or they may prove to be equally-suited to their local contexts.

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[15] See, for example, Bacharach and Bamberger, 1995; Corcoran and Goertz, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Goertz, Floden, and O'Day, 1995; Louis, Marks, and Kruse, 1994; McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993; and Rowan, 1995.

82

The School Perspective on the Benefits of Clusters

According to school staff, the cluster structure is contributing to increased capacity for improving teaching and learning in a number of important ways. These perceived benefits include increased articulation and communication, clusterwide pooling of resources, support and responsiveness, a sense of intimacy and unity, and parental organizing.

Articulation

School participants noted that the cluster organization was facilitating improved articulation and communication across schools at different grade levels. Teachers and administrators were coordinating texts, curriculum, and expectations and believed that these efforts would result in students who were better able to make successful transitions from one school level to the next. Cluster staff had assisted high schools with the development of programs, such as open houses or "community days," to orient and attract students throughout the cluster. Not only did the middle and high schools staff see articulation as a significant benefit, but staff in two of the four elementary schools also cited the value of coordination with other local elementaries. One middle school principal noted that the cluster arrangement made things easier; there was simply a "less defensive" response by elementary staff when discussion of student readiness for middle schools occurred in the context of the cluster.

Pooling of Resources to Support Specific Pedagogical Philosophies

School participants reported that resources were being pooled among schools in their clusters for purchasing curriculum and consultant services. Regardless of their commitment to all elements of the initiative, they saw value in this fiscal cooperation. In one cluster, for example, schools had decided to combine resources to purchase materials and consultation in order to utilize a particular elementary math program. In the same cluster, schools had received support from the cluster to participate in Coalition for Essential Schools retreats and in ongoing Coalition-style meetings that were helping them reflect on their own school programs. In another cluster, resources will be provided clusterwide through an "Entrepreneurial Center" that will link job training, business development, and public education. Acting collectively, schools are expanding their capacity to purchase curriculum materials and training.

Cluster Support and Responsiveness

School staff members, particularly principals, considered the cluster organization to be an improvement over regional offices because it was more responsive and supportive of their needs. Principals reported that the cluster leaders understood their needs because they had been principals themselves and because, in such a small unit, they were closer to the schools. One principal suggested that the cluster leaders should also have the authority to rate principals because they would have greater knowledge of principals' performance than a downtown administrator. Staff and administrators said that cluster leaders willingly assisted them in dealing with the central office and "cutting red tape," particularly regarding access to finances. One high school principal characterized the cluster office staff as "problem-solvers. I can go to them and I don't have to deal with downtown."

Intimacy and Unity Within the Cluster Structure

Most school staff, particularly principals, liked the small size of the cluster. Sharing a common perspective, and serving the same neighborhoods gave them a greater sense of unity and cohesiveness. Some of the principals said they liked the chance to interact and confer with other principals in their cluster because it reduced their sense of isolation. Staff members also noted the advantages of being in a smaller unit and believed they would become better acquainted with students and programs in other schools.

Organizing of Parents to Support Common Concerns

Two efforts coordinated by school officials in the Olney cluster demonstrate how a cluster can mobilize its parents to take action that furthers their own interests. For example, the FRN encouraged parents to participate in efforts led by a citywide group, Philadelphia Interfaith Action, to pressure the mayor to provide greater police presence in the neighborhoods around the Olney Cluster. Because the issue was safety, parents readily participated and were able to magnify their influence by banding together as a cluster rather than acting as individual school groups. In another case, parents organized to protest school district budget cuts at City Hall.

New Resources and Professional Development

The schools have benefited from new resources, as well as the opportunities provided for dialogue with experts and peer interaction. Staff members in most of the schools considered the TLN to be a valuable resource (see Section VI), offering training in areas such as alternative assessment, standards, preparation for the new testing program, cooperative learning, team building, and implementing SLCs. TLN staff worked with new or "weak" teachers, assisted teacher leaders and administrators in planning retreats and meetings, and responded to special requests such as helping with school improvement planning.

Retreat opportunities made possible by *Children Achieving* were highlighted as being particularly helpful. One school used cluster funds for a retreat on building staff cohesiveness. Those who attended believed it set the stage for more positive staff relations and reform efforts. Several high school teachers were inspired by a school-to-career retreat on "intensive scheduling," which provided new models for rostering when students spend time outside of the school building. Another school planned to use professional development funds for SLC retreats to develop standards and plans for the next school year.

Some of the schools, particularly at the middle and elementary levels, thought that the 1995 Summer Institute, sponsored by the district and organized by PEF, helped them consider the implications of setting up SLCs in their schools. One principal said, "It helped us to reflect on what we were already doing and how we could adapt to small learning communities in our school."

Various district initiatives directed resources for computers and computer infrastructures to the schools, and staff acknowledged *Children Achieving*'s role in this regard. School staff members also praised cluster office or Office of Technology staff for providing technical assistance. For example, support from IBM in the Olney Cluster provided eight additional computers to one of the middle schools we visited.

The FRN was also well-regarded in the schools, although not all staff were aware of its presence (see Section VII). Schools made use of FRN discretionary funds to provide student services by hiring school-community coordinators, establishing "discipline" rooms, and paying for school-organized college visits. Schools also spent a portion of discretionary FRN funds on activities to increase community involvement. In one setting, the school-community coordinator worked with the school nurse and counselor to form an effective team that coordinated student support services. In some schools, funds were used to recruit parent volunteers, to pay parents to meet during the summer, or to open the school to parents by providing a venue and activities.

LSC training also brought new resources into the schools. Most school staff interviewed felt that retreats and other cluster-provided training and consultant services served as effective vehicles for involving parents in the new decision-making structure. At the time of this fieldwork, members of the newly formed LSCs had either just been on a clusterwide or local school retreat or were preparing to attend one. Most LSC members who attended these retreats thought that they were very useful; those who anticipated attending retreats were looking forward to helping the LSCs get started. Staff considered the training and information provided through the cluster as absolutely essential for launching the LSC and helping members learn how to make collective decisions and communicate effectively. LSC members and other school staff members also hoped that the training would clarify the roles and authority of the LSC in the school.

New District Values

The new values espoused by the Board of Education and the Superintendent gave many staff members, particularly reform-minded teachers and principals, a greater sense of legitimacy. Staff in schools that were already engaged in reforms and those in the high school SLCs felt that the advent of *Children Achieving* validated their efforts and the techniques they were using. One teacher noted, "*Children Achieving* cheers you on. You don't feel like you're alone. Now it is the whole district that is behind you." In another statement, a teacher distinguished *Children Achieving* from previous reform efforts saying, "In past reform movements, you felt you were going to do it in spite of the district. Now we are looked at as being ahead. We feel support for what we have been doing."

School-based decision making about professional development expenditures also increased support for *Children Achieving*. In several sites, teachers said they felt empowered when asked to participate in decisions over the use of cluster-provided professional development funds. This participation was viewed by those interviewed as the only tangible evidence that the district was serious about professionalization and decentralization.

The LSCs were also seen as evidence of changing district values. Both school staff members and parents understood that the composition and role of the LSC meant that parents were going to be involved in decision making on school issues. Although there was disagreement over which areas of school operations should fall under the purview of the LSC, there was no doubt that parents would participate as full members. In a few schools, staff members thought that the LSC might become a vehicle for more effective participation among members of the school community in school decisions and policy making. Others thought that the LSC's democratic structure and diverse membership would encourage everyone to "take ownership" of decisions. Others were skeptical about the district's commitment and about involving parents in school decision-making.

Finally, classroom practice was challenged by the district's new values. This was most evident from teacher reactions to the SAT9, the district's new testing program. They became aware of the need to change classroom practices in order to help students succeed. Specifically, teachers realized that they would have to require more writing, problem-solving, and project-based lessons and use more thematic units to prepare students for the new tests. For example, a second-grade teacher at one elementary school said, "There's no more one word answers with these tests. No more bubbling. Teachers will have to change the way they teach to get kids ready for this kind of test." Another teacher at the same school noted, "We had sample tests... It was an eye opener." At another high school, an SLC coordinator remarked, "The new testing program requires writing and problem solving. So we must change what we do for kids to be successful on those tests."

School Factors Affecting the Pace of Reforms

When asked to describe the *Children Achieving* agenda, some people said, "How can you disagree with it? It's common sense." Others called it unique, different from preceding reforms. Taken individually, the elements of *Children Achieving* appeared to be familiar to many school staff, since they had been directly or indirectly exposed to these ideas over the past few years. Some of the schools in our sample have ongoing programs and efforts that share the goals and values of *Children Achieving*, including broad community participation and long-term partnerships with community institutions; focused teaching and learning programs such as writing/literacy, thematic curricula, and cooperative learning; and democratic and broadly representative decision-making bodies. Others have strengths in some of these areas, but are not as far along in others. What is novel about *Children Achieving* is its comprehensiveness—it unites these individual reform efforts under one umbrella and forces the schools to address the entire agenda.

Schools that seemed to be making the most progress with the reforms emphasized by *Children Achieving* shared the following common features:

- a coherent, shared vision of school goals and program direction;
- experience in sustained engagement in working toward a vision;
- an atmosphere of trust and a sense of mutual interdependence among all of the members of the school community; and
- an infrastructure to support the program and decision making.

We hypothesize that these features are among the key building blocks in developing a school's capacity for carrying out instructional reforms and to take advantage of the support and vision offered by *Children Achieving*.

In examining implementation across schools, we found that *Children Achieving*'s value to a school depended in large part on its strengths and weaknesses in these four areas of capacity. In the following sections, the report describes how having high capacity in these four areas facilitated the implementation of *Children Achieving*. We also discuss contextual and school factors that have impeded the reform's progress.

A Coherent, Shared Vision

The most important characteristic of schools that were making progress with the reforms was a shared understanding among staff and administration about "good" instruction or agreement on a set of pedagogical principles. These schools may not have achieved all of their goals, but they at least had established a direction that was shared by the entire staff and school community. Only four of the schools in our sample had such a schoolwide vision. Their staff members were able to relate *Children Achieving* to their own improvement efforts. For the most part, they used its supports to pursue their reform vision, although participation in the development work for *Children Achieving* and in cluster activities also extended their ideas.

Through exposure to charters and other efforts, Philadelphia high schools have had the most experience with implementing SLCs, and the three we studied were completely "charterized." In these settings, a great deal of thought had been given to SLC logistics, and, though not all of the issues had been resolved, they were at least well known. In each of the high schools, we found some variation among the SLCs in the degree to which they had achieved staff cohesiveness, a strong and identifiable theme, meaningful SLC membership, and autonomy to make programmatic decisions. In contrast, although the middle schools have had histories with "houses," only a few had experimented with vertical groupings. One school was establishing vertical houses for the first time, a plan they decided to implement in anticipation of *Children Achieving*. In the elementary schools, grade groups or horizontal arrangements were the most common structures, and we did observe one school in which grade groups were collaborating on curriculum and planning grade-level themes. This was also a setting in which staff had begun to experiment with vertical arrangements. Teachers in this elementary school were beginning to recognize that these vertical arrangements offered advantages, and the advent of SLCs seemed to them a natural next step. In other elementary schools such discussions were just beginning.

In a few of the elementary and middle schools we visited, there were extensive schoolwide efforts to implement alternative assessment approaches. Staff had worked together to develop rubrics for judging student work and models for portfolios that could be used to array their work and demonstrate improvement. In these sites, the district's approach to accountability and standards paralleled the school's. The focus was on student performance and providing classroom opportunities for students to demonstrate learning through projects and problem-solving. In two schools, the principals noted how curriculum redesign undertaken to meet the requirements of the Title I assessment had prepared them for the new SAT9 tests. Interestingly, the schools most advanced in these areas were less likely to see the TLN as helpful. They preferred to rely on internal expertise and previously established networks and they required more customized training than the TLN staff could initially provide.

Consistency of leadership also contributed to building and sustaining a shared vision. The principals of the four schools with higher capacity for reform had held their positions for at least five years. In one case, the school's principal was hired by the community members who founded it. In many of the other schools, staff indicated that administrative turnover and leadership ambiguity posed significant obstacles to building agreement about new approaches.

In only one of the schools visited did improvement planning include serious thought about the relationships among the school, parents, and the wider community. This school was founded as a result of parental action, so the principal and her staff constantly sought parents' feedback and renewed their commitment to parental involvement. They had no problem with including parents on the LSC, although they expressed the hope that it would not undermine existing decision-making structures. In schools without such experiences with parents, staff were more likely to express skepticism about involving parents.

Sustained Experience with Improvement

Prior Experiences. Some of the schools in our sample had been engaged in programs that contributed to their sophistication with new pedagogical approaches or with specific teaching and learning philosophies prior to *Children Achieving*. Involvement with PEF's predecessors, PATHS/PRISM and the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative provided school staff with sustained engagement with specific approaches, such as integrated curriculum and portfolio assessment. Programs in discipline areas such as the Urban Mathematics Collaborative and the K-12 Math/Science Leadership Congress, along with science programs such as the Science Resource Leaders (SRL) or Project 2061, had oriented some teachers to new teaching and assessment approaches and positioned them to take the lead in curriculum and standards development. When the Urban Systemic Initiative (USI) arrived, Science Resource Leaders or Math Collaborative participants were most often delegated to take the lead. These initiatives provided teachers with extensive training in standards and assessment, new classroom practices, and leadership and made them experts in their schools.

The Gratz Connection, which encouraged cross-school articulation and provided staff development and planning time for groups of teachers, and the Penn Literacy Program, in which teachers engage in writing activities with their students, provided staff development in teaching approaches such as cooperative learning, writing across the curriculum, integrated curriculum, and project-based learning. These programs encouraged teacher collaboration and developed teacher leaders who have had a significant impact in some schools. At every school we visited, there was a group of teachers who had been involved in one or more of these initiatives. Many of them were taking leadership roles in the development and implementation of *Children Achieving*.

Receptiveness to School-Based Staff Development. Some of the schools we studied had previously engaged in school-based staff development efforts. In one school, the reading teacher had been working over several years with groups of teachers across all grades on developing rubrics for student writing. At the same site, an outside group was in its second year of providing training to all teachers on the use of cooperative learning, teaming, and writing. Another school was in its second year of a planning effort for which teachers set goals to implement new teaching practices and collectively planned and reviewed their progress. Many of the high school SLCs described long-term planning and staff-development efforts for devising a curricular theme, mastering a pedagogical approach, or using new forms of assessment. In these settings, the self-conscious focus on teaching and learning, and a habit of collaboration and mutual support among teachers made it possible to take full advantage of professional development opportunities and to use sharing and coaching to spread new techniques among the staff.

Lessons Learned from Previous Attempts with School-Based Management/School-Based Decision Making. Although teachers may have long tenures in a building, they may not have had opportunities over time to collaborate on consequential decisions. In some of the schools we visited, staff did report having experience with a variety of such opportunities, such as long-standing committees or coordinating groups with stable—but not exclusive—patterns of membership.

A few of the schools we studied had participated in earlier efforts to decentralize authority to the school level and had explored, or actually established, a governance council that included teachers and parents along with the principal. Staff and students at one school with a governance council perceived it to be exclusive. However, the principal and others in this school looked forward to another chance at implementing local governance, saying: "Maybe we'll do it right this time." Even in sites without governance councils, staff felt they could tap their experience with the process to avoid pitfalls.

However, there was far less experience working with parents. There were many "volunteer" parents in most of the schools we visited, but their involvement was usually sought for assistance with programs, not for planning or responding to programs. One school conducted regular meetings of a coordinating committee that included parents and sought regular feedback from the Home and School Association. This effort was a natural foundation for *Children Achieving*, since the school programs have involved parents over time.

Infrastructures to Support Collaboration

Time for Talk and Reflection. Several of the schools we visited scheduled organized time during the school day or summer months for planning. In one elementary school, having a common prep time for grade group teachers was so important that decisions about the budget were premised on finding ways to maintain this practice. In another school, the principal and teachers agreed to bank time in order to set it aside for planning and reflection. This time was used for developing thematic units, discussing new assessment procedures, and evaluating the success of their collective effort.

Decision-Making Structures. As described elsewhere, structures for staff participation were already in place at most schools, and in one case parents participated in decision making. Multiple structures—grade groups, steering committees, house groups, curriculum groups, leadership teams, and coordinating committees—usually existed within one school. In high-capacity schools, the roles and responsibility of each of these groups were clearly defined and widely known.

Principals in a few of the schools were committed to being inclusive and had established structures for decision making that worked toward developing consensual visions. One school had committees in which every teacher participated. In another setting, there was a single "coordinating committee," open to anyone who wanted to participate as long as they made a commitment to attend meetings over an extended period of time. This committee included students and parents. Staff in these schools were concerned with how the creation of an LSC would alter decision-making.

Programs to Increase Community Involvement. We found several programs that predated *Children Achieving*, yet were compatible with its goals. These programs included the National School and Community Corps and College Access, a PEF program and a long-standing service learning initiative. Some schools were using the Family Math program as a vehicle to encourage parent involvement.

Student Support/Assistance Teams. Some schools used funding from outside agencies to establish two- or three-person teams, usually including a counselor or nurse and some instructional staff, to assist students who needed additional help in adjusting to, or becoming successful in, the school. In several schools, we found student support teams working together with different levels of energy and visibility. Some were just getting underway and others were incorporated into long-standing programs focusing on special-needs students. These teams offer a starting point for the FRN.

Trust and Mutual Interdependence

A Critical Mass of Teachers Open to New Approaches. In a few of the schools, most teachers and staff supported a whole-school direction. While not all teachers in the school were at the same level of proficiency or comfort with new approaches, there was a willingness to receive coaching from colleagues. In more than one school, we heard teachers or administrators note how refreshing it was to hear new ideas from teachers just exiting college education programs. In one elementary school, staff invited a first-year teacher adept at using whole-language approaches to give workshops and to coach colleagues. At the same time, older teachers volunteered to mentor first-year teachers, offering advice on issues that seasoned teachers had mastered, such as classroom management and dealing with student problems. In these settings, the old "egg crate" classroom model was not visible; rather, teachers were open to having visitors and observers and sought feedback from fellow teachers.

Collaboration with Parents. In only one of the schools we visited was there a strong parent presence in the decision-making process. In that setting, the school itself grew out of community pressure, and much of its program evolved in response to community priorities. The principal and staff felt the presence of parents and community members in every decision they made. Furthermore, they consulted with parents on curriculum-related activities and as advisors for aspects of their multi-cultural program. This was a school that respected parents' knowledge and was beholden to the community for its very existence. While no other school was as deeply committed to involving parents in decision making, there were other sites where staff valued parents' knowledge and wisdom. In these sites, staff believed in the potential of children and embraced the LSC's inclusion of parents.

In one elementary school, parent assistants were present in every classroom, and teachers relied on them for help during a series of theme-culminating activities at the end of the school year. The middle school founded as a result of community demand chose common books to read each year that reflected the cultural and ethnic groups in the neighborhood. Students in that school could trace their sense of belonging in the school to activities in the classroom that helped them learn about each other's traditions and beliefs.

As discussed above, four of the key elements of school capacity are: a coherent vision of goals and program direction, previous experience carrying out a program, infrastructure to support program decision making, and an atmosphere of trust and mutual interdependence. Clearly, when these elements are lacking, the school's potential for reform, with or without *Children Achieving*, is seriously limited. In schools lacking a coherent vision, we noted that no framework existed for situating *Children Achieving*'s new support structures and opportunities for teacher learning.

Staff in low-capacity schools value professional development and training, but they lacked the focus and experience needed to make good choices and often ended with fragmented or personalized activities that were not likely to have much effect. However, these aspects of *Children Achieving* are absolutely critical for putting low-capacity schools on track. In schools with a high capacity for reform, staff members valued TLN programs and assistance, but only if they complemented what the schools were already doing. Without previous experience working together over time to implement programs, staff members were more likely to be cynical and pessimistic about the new reforms. Their schools did not possess the "social capital" necessary to take full advantage of new opportunities for reflection and redirection. Infrastructure to support shared decision making must have time to gain credibility among members of the school community and to mature in its functioning. Finally, if trust and mutual interdependence were lacking, we saw evidence of miscommunication and misunderstanding between staff and students, staff and parents, as well as administration and staff.

Contextual Factors Affecting the Pace of Reform

The various elements of *Children Achieving* were not clear to many of the staff members we interviewed. While most staff members and parents understood some of the basic features of small learning communities and could identify their local school council representatives, they needed more guidance about what these structures would look like in practice or how they would differ from previous efforts to foster local decision making. In the elementary schools and some of the middle schools, staff generally understood the idea that SLCs should involve multiple grades and be theme-based, but questions remained over whether SLCs needed to involve all of the grades, how a theme would enter in, and how SLCs would affect long-established grade groupings. Even in high schools with long-established SLCs, there were questions about whether the goals of *Children Achieving*'s SLCs were different from the goals of the restructured high schools' small student groupings. While staff in some settings began bold experiments this year with new forms that could become SLCs, others were struggling to imagine what form SLCs would take in their schools. Some elementary schools were comfortable with experimenting with various forms, but teaching staff in other sites lacked ideas, but were waiting for clearer guidelines. Most middle schools had experimented with models in the past, and some staff members expressed cynicism about revisiting discarded approaches.

Perceptions of Inadequate Coordination. Staff members also expressed confusion over, or knew little about, *Children Achieving*'s content standards, particularly since there were multiple, concurrent initiatives in the district with attached "standards" and "benchmarks." While those we encountered who actually served on standards writing teams understood this component of *Children Achieving*, others had only a limited comprehension of this aspect of the reforms. Still others associated standards with work they were already doing in alternative assessment. For most, standards meant accountability and raised fears about fairness and consequences.

Although many staff and parents were familiar with the LSCs and the FRN, there were at least as many staff members who knew little or nothing at all about these structures. Even teachers and parents who were LSC members were vague about the purpose of the councils and the extent of their power and responsibility. They were not yet sure what areas of authority the council would have and how it would work with other decision-making bodies in the school. Staff and parents who had participated in LSC retreats were generally positive about them, yet they believed there were still many issues to resolve. That the principal had only one vote on the council indicated that LSCs intended to give members equal voice, but LSC composition did not convey any messages about power and authority and gave no indication whether its decisions could be over-ruled at other levels of the district's hierarchy. In one school with a widely respected and inclusive decision-making body, staff expressed concern about how the LSC would fit: "We're comfortable with the PST after a long time of building trust. The LSC is a new game. It has to take second place for a while. It will take time to build trust." In a different elementary school with a similar decision-making process, staff members feared that the LSC would "re-centralize" and destroy their hard-won democracy. In a school without an inclusive process, one LSC member's comments echoed the desire for clarification that we heard repeatedly from many quarters: "I think the big problem is none of us know what our authority is as an LSC."

School staff members also cited a lack of coordination among "downtown" offices, the Office of Schools, and the clusters. They pointed to specific problems that indicated poor coordination related to teaching and learning, such as the difficulty in accessing funds for professional development, last-minute decision making about the use of 1995-96 professional development funds, late planning and unclear priorities concerning the K-12 Literacy Institute last summer, and the lack of information about plans for the 1996 Summer Institute. Other coordination problems included conflicting demands on their time for meetings, confusion over who was sponsoring various programs and staff development, difficulty getting access to funds to carry out program initiatives, and having to complete "excessive paperwork." These coordination problems undermined school staff members' confidence and worked against district efforts to devolve power to the school or SLC level.

Perceptions of Top Down Reform. While most teachers and administrators admitted that *Children Achieving* included many elements that they could support or were already in progress in their schools, some also expressed frustration that they were being required to institute SLCs, LSCs, standards, and new assessment approaches that would require them to "teach to a test." One high school teacher commented, "There's a lot of information that should be talked about and not just thrown out there [referring to a recent retreat on intensive scheduling]. We were given the illusion that we have some input rather than having real input." Some reform-oriented teachers, who felt that they had been previously working against the tide, expressed mistrust of sweeping agendas and a preference for bottom-up approaches. An elementary teacher echoed these sentiments: "I'm a little skeptical about whether it's going to be a bottom-up approach or it's still going to be top down."

Perceptions that Children Achieving was not Meeting School Needs. Some complained that *Children Achieving* was not addressing their schools' needs. This complaint was frequently made in reference to class sizes and classroom resources. In other cases, schools identified special needs they felt *Children Achieving* was neglecting, such as school librarians and full-day kindergartens. Some school community members wondered if *Children Achieving* could address the root problems in urban schools and questioned whether it was offering a response to school improvement that was too standardized to address the needs of individual schools.

Some of the schools in our sample had established their own directions long ago, having learned the lesson that it is better not to blend the school's destiny with the district's. Typical responses to *Children Achieving* in these settings included: "We find the answers within ourselves. We're not dependent on what is going on around us." "*Children Achieving* can come and go, we have a program that will succeed with or without it." Concern over whether or not the resources to implement *Children Achieving* would be forthcoming made even those who supported the plan wholeheartedly wonder about its future.

Does Children Achieving have a future? Our fieldwork occurred during the most intense media coverage that Philadelphia public schools have received in many years, most of it concerning the budget crisis, budget cuts, and adequacy of financial support from the city and state. The overwhelming attention to money—and David Hornbeck's admission that *Children Achieving* could not be enacted without it—raised doubts in the minds of school staff about the long-term viability of the reform. Plenty of skepticism already existed, since many previous reforms had come and gone. In one teacher's words, "Teachers long in the system are guessing whether the new initiatives are going to be beneficial or just go away in a year or two."

Funding Losses at Other Levels of Government. Most of the schools we visited this spring were anticipating losses of funding due to cuts in Federal Title I expenditures. Spring budget decisions had to incorporate both district and federal cuts, so schools were reconfiguring to absorb the reductions. For most schools, the projected cuts affected staffing and some programs. In our observations of budget discussions and in interviews, we learned how some schools used their clear sense of priorities to guide budget decision making. They were able to maintain direction even in the face of reduced funding. However, losing staff and programs can undermine consistency and motivation to work toward long-term goals.

Staffing, Factionalism, Role Conflicts, and Union Response. Lumped together here are a set of human factors that can undermine concerted work on reform at the school level. Many staff and administrators noted the difference in attitude between "seasoned" and new teachers. Certainly, there are many experienced teachers in Philadelphia who are working energetically toward school reform and improvement, but there was a general consensus that "seasoned" teachers were among the most resistant to *Children Achieving*. Perhaps their previous experience had deepened their skepticism about the possibilities for reform, but they needed to be won over because their negative attitudes often engendered low morale.

We also heard about the negative impact of factionalism among staff or parents, the uneven quality of staff, and rules governing the reassignment of teachers. While we interviewed principals who had succeeded in bringing staff into the decision-making process and in rallying a critical mass of teachers, almost every principal also wanted the ability to hire his or her own staff in order to move forward with school goals.

The Community's Negative Views of Local High Schools. A major concern for both parents and students in all three clusters was safety; many of the high schools have reputations as being unsafe, violent, and dangerous places. Although students we interviewed in the high schools reported that the schools were safer and less frightening than they had expected, middle school students recounted horror stories told by relatives and friends of violent incidents in the comprehensive high schools told by relatives and friends. Most of the middle school students said they did not want to attend the cluster high school, and they were applying to the magnet schools. The high school students we interviewed were in cluster schools because they had not been accepted by a magnet program.

Another factor influencing students' choices was their perception that neighborhood high schools lacked challenging curricula. Middle school students perceived their neighborhood high schools to have low academic standards and few high-quality teachers. When we interviewed students in the high schools, they talked about choosing among the SLCs to meet their interests and the need for intellectual challenge.

Turnover. One of the contemporary realities of the Philadelphia public schools has been high turnover of both students and principals. Principal turnover occurs because of the reward system and district assignment procedures. For some of the schools in our sample, these policies have undermined progress toward creating consistent programs. Student turnover or transience is also a serious obstacle to realizing the ideal of SLCs and is particularly pronounced at the high school level. It presents a challenge to the requirement for "charter purity" because of the constant need to issue new rosters. It also undermines the value of creating a consistent relationship among adults and students over time.

Issues and Questions for Future Research

What does this analysis suggest for understanding the contribution *Children Achieving* has made to schools in their struggles with reform? We have suggested that there are three categories of support which *Children Achieving* is offering to schools: the cluster structure, professional development and resources, and new districtwide values. We also described how schools' histories and practices contribute to their capacity to utilize these supports effectively. The key factors are having a schoolwide vision, experience sustaining engagement with a vision, an infrastructure to support the program, and an atmosphere of trust and mutual interdependence. The data reviewed here suggests that *Children Achieving*'s primary benefit to schools that already have a high capacity for site-based reform is through cluster-provided advantages and new district values. Clusters connect reform-oriented schools to resources they could not gain through their own efforts, as well as offering supports that propel already high-functioning schools forward by adding momentum through the validation of their efforts.

For other schools, where progress in one or more of these areas is lacking, local school capacity must be built before they can take full advantage of the systemic nature of the reform. In schools without a coherent vision of reform, staff were more likely to be frustrated by what they saw as a lack of detail in the *Children Achieving* agenda, and dragged their feet during implementation. In sites without experience carrying out a program over an extended period of time or where there had been inconsistent leadership and short-term programs, staff were more likely to see *Children Achieving* either as ephemeral or simply as another "program" with which to contend. Staff in schools with experience in sustained programs may also view *Children Achieving* as ephemeral, but they did not think they would be fazed by its disappearance; it would not affect what they were doing in their schools. Where the infrastructure to support a coherent program was not in place, there were no forums to discuss and reflect on *Children Achieving*. We were amazed at the degree to which staff in these schools relied on the media and word of mouth for information about *Children Achieving*. Finally, where there was no atmosphere of trust and mutual interdependence, teachers worried about their colleagues' commitment and gave many negative characterizations of students, their parents, and the neighborhoods in which schools were located. It is hard to imagine that these staff members believe all children can achieve or that schools should relate to their communities—both basic tenets of *Children Achieving*.

Based on interviews with cluster and school personnel, the evaluation team has arrived at some "hunches" that can serve as hypotheses to pursue in greater depth in the coming years. We offer them here to stimulate discussion, particularly about the cluster system, bearing in mind that 16 new clusters are currently being formed and will be operational in 1996-97. The hypotheses are:

- **Smaller K-12 units will prove to be more effective at supporting reforms**. The cluster structure will prove to be more popular with school staff than the regions they have replaced. They will be especially popular for those who embrace the reforms; they will welcome the opportunities for dialogue across schools and across levels and the responsiveness of a more intimate administrative structure.

- **Resources matter**. The clusters that are most effective at raising resources for the schools will, *ceteris paribus*, be more effective in changing practice and improving performance.

- **Focus matters**. The clusters in which the schools develop a common focus on their own or adopt a strategy championed by the cluster leader will, *ceteris paribus*, be more effective in changing practice and improving performance. Similarly, schools whose staff develop a strong commitment to an instructional approach or a school design will be more effective in changing their practice and improving the performance of their students.

- **Leadership matters**. The clusters and schools in which the leader or leadership team offer clear and coherent visions for instructional improvement will, *ceteris paribus*, allocate their resources differently, develop stronger collegiality and cooperation, and be more effective in changing practice and improving performance.

- **Authority matters**. In the end, bestowing the rating authority that cluster leaders want, but do not have, will prove to be important in maintaining their ability to lead, particularly in dealing with ineffective or recalcitrant principals.

- **Success breeds success**. Those cluster leaders who succeed, by whatever means, in focusing the attention of school staff and professional development resources on sustained efforts toward instructional improvement will see the greatest performance gains and these gains in time will produce greater consensus, commitment, and cooperation among their schools' staff.

IX. Summary of Findings and Future Research

Moving its reform agenda from paper to reality in six clusters and 67 schools, the School District of Philadelphia made considerable progress in *Children Achieving*'s first year, completing all the important development and implementation tasks set for the period. The first six clusters were operational. Content standards were drafted in math, reading/language arts, science, and the arts. Critical pieces of the support infrastructure were operational in the six clusters. And, the process of changing school organization and governance began. Participants at all levels reported that the cluster system and the TLN were working and that other elements of *Children Achieving*—the Small Learning Communities, Local School Councils, and the Family Resource Network—were being put into place.

Based on our analysis of data collected through observations, interviews, and document reviews, our principal findings about the progress of *Children Achieving* in Year One are:

- There were significant districtwide accomplishments. Full-day kindergarten was implemented in 67 additional elementary schools across the district. The opening of school was improved, and the leveling process occurred more quickly, reducing the loss of instructional time. A new testing program was installed. The content standards in math, reading/language arts, science, and the arts were drafted, reviewed by experts, and distributed to all teachers for their review.

- The vision and the theory of action underlying *Children Achieving* are understood and generally accepted in the central office and among cluster staff. But they are less well understood in the schools, where many still perceive *Children Achieving* to be a collection of projects without connections. Many like the ten points, but they do not believe that they can be implemented. To some, the reforms are still "pie in the sky," while to others they seem threatening.

- The basic infrastructure of *Children Achieving* was put in place in the first six clusters; while not all components were operational in 1995-96, they were being implemented according to schedule. Most participants' reaction to the cluster system was positive, and it seems to have released considerable energy in the schools. Morale is high among cluster staff, but the workload is formidable, and the sharpness of the focus on teaching and learning reforms varies across clusters.

- Significant funds were invested in professional development, but their use varied widely by school, and the expenditure was often not tied to a coherent plan. Much of the activity involved conventional workshops or trips to conferences, and it is likely to have limited impact on practice. More guidance and standards are needed.

- The Teaching and Learning Network seems to have gained acceptance in the first six clusters, with two caveats: high school staff remain more skeptical and resistant, and the current TLN approach may not fit well with the cultures and needs of high-capacity schools. Linkages between the TLN and other key components of the teaching and learning support system (PEF and the Office of Best Practices) are weak and need attention.

- Other components of *Children Achieving*, such as the SLCs and the LSCs, are being implemented, but they are often not well-understood by school staff. In particular, the SLCs are being created from existing arrangements and some lack the cohesion, shared philosophy, and collegiality intended to be their primary features. They need time to be formed and to mature, and many elementary schools require time for experimentation with different models.

- While a strong and committed leadership group has generated a great deal of enthusiasm for the broad goals of the FRN, the ambiguity of its role has created confusion. The confusion leaves some staff uncertain about how to proceed, and others, particularly school-level staff, are still unclear about what the FRN is and what it is supposed to accomplish.

- Most school staff are struggling with one or more of the core reforms: teaching and learning, governance, and family and community involvement. Of the eleven schools we examined, only three were effectively addressing all dimensions, and they were judged to have been high-capacity schools prior to the advent of *Children Achieving*. Three others were doing little in any area, and were assessed as being schools with a low capacity for reform. The remaining schools fell into the middle of this range.

- The schools that had made the most progress in implementing reforms had common characteristics: a shared vision based on an instructional philosophy or approach, experience with sustained efforts to implement change, an atmosphere of trust and mutual interdependence among members of the school community, and structures to support the program and collaborative decision making. In these schools, there was a feeling among the staff that they were already headed in a direction that was parallel to *Children Achieving*. Those working in schools that lacked capacity on all four dimensions appeared to be overwhelmed and unfocused.

- Schools with a high capacity for reform considered *Children Achieving* as legitimating their own efforts. However, the reforms have been less successful in helping staff in low capacity schools find a clear focus, or a path of action. *Children Achieving* has not yet offered them a clear vision of teaching and learning, and they do not know how to respond to the reforms. Some cluster leaders are compensating for this gap by providing a vision or by developing a shared vision with their schools.

- The content standards and the district's emerging accountability system were becoming the foci of attention for school-based staff, and many felt threatened by these aspects of *Children Achieving*. There was little practical application of the interim standards, and most teachers were not well-prepared to use standards to guide instruction or curricular design. The SAT9 made many teachers realize that they have to do something differently in their classrooms. Others believed that it simply cannot be done. Clear models of practice and curricular materials linked to the standards are needed to lend confidence.

- With the exception of decision making on professional development, cluster and school staff did not see much real progress in decentralizing authority. Some even questioned its wisdom. They complained about a lack of budget information and the difficulty of spending money. They also worried that the school councils will have no real authority or that they will misuse it.

- School staff perceived there was too much confusion, last-minute planning, and lack of coordination in the central office. They received information in fragments that did not tie the elements of *Children Achieving* into a coherent plan. This poor communication did not lend confidence and failed to demonstrate the power of the plan. Too little attention was given to internal communications, to explaining, persuading, and motivating school and district staff.

- The viability of Children Achieving is challenged by the district's fiscal crisis, union opposition, media attacks, the interventions of the Court and the City Council, the controversy over the work of the Philadelphia Education Fund and the history of previous reform efforts.

Research Questions

It has been a trying year in many ways, and an exhausting one for those working on *Children Achieving*. The next year, however, promises to be even more difficult as the content standards are adopted, 16 new clusters begin their work, and the district moves forward with its new accountability system. These initiatives raise a host of important questions that should be addressed by the evaluation.

- **Resources**. There are critical questions concerning the adequacy of the resources available to schools and clusters. Will all schools have sufficient resources to implement the reforms as designed? Will the 16 new clusters be able to function effectively with fewer resources than those available to the original six? Where will the differences appear? How will external resources be mobilized and used?

- **Standards**. Questions concerning the implementation of standards include: How will teachers respond to them? What will be the relative effect on curriculum and practice of accountability indicators such as SAT9 scores and the standards? How will the accountability system affect teacher behavior, SLCs, and school and cluster priorities?

- **Teaching and Learning**. On what basis will the TLN decide to invest in a particular strategy, curriculum, or program? How will the TLN decide which instructional practices to emphasize? What role will knowledge about developmental consequences and instructional practices play in these decisions, and what will be its sources? Will these decisions be informed by the Office of Best Practices? How will "best practices" be determined? Will teachers and schools welcome, resist, or ignore the "filtering" aspect of the Office of Best Practices, which some believe runs counter to the local decision-making principle of *Children Achieving*?

- **Small Learning Communities**. What forms of SLCs will develop, and how will they be affected by the standards, as well as by the assessment and accountability systems? What effects will different forms of SLCs have on teachers, students and parents?

- **Decentralization**. What areas of decision making will fall under the purview of the LSCs? What kinds of decisions will LSC's make? How will their decisions affect the SLCs?
- **The Cluster Organization**. Will the clusters that have adopted a common instructional vision make more progress than those encouraging schools to set their own direction? Will the next 16 clusters meet with the same success as the original six? What difference, if any, will resource differentials have on cluster performance? Will cluster services be valued by the schools and SLCs?
- **Professional Development**. What will be the patterns of use of professional development funds? What will be the quality of the professional development offered or brokered by the TLN? To what degree will there be focused, sustained professional development programs in the schools? How will these priorities be determined? What factors contribute to, or obstruct, developing a focus? What will be the effects of professional development in schools with varying capacity and varying approaches to improvement? And how will the new support infrastructure affect the way these issues are addressed and resolved?
- **Coordination and Linkage**. Will coordination of resources improve? How will the Office of Best Practices and the TLN work together to improve professional development delivery in the school system? How will internal organizational issues such as communication be addressed? Will central units become more responsive to clusters and schools?
- **Parent and Community Involvement**. How effective will the LSCs be at engaging parents? What school factors will be related to increased parental involvement?
- **Contextual Issues**. Will the political, fiscal, and legal environments remain as turbulent as they were in 1995-96, or will support for *Children Achieving* grow, providing a more stable environment for the reform initiative?

These questions will be addressed over the next two years, and will shape both the teacher survey and the selection of the school sample for intensive fieldwork.

Children Achieving Challenge Oversight Committee

Children Achieving Challenge Staff

A Word of Thanks

The Children Achieving Challenge
is a program of
Greater Philadelphia First

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Evaluation of *Children Achieving* 2
***Children Achieving*'s Theory of Action** 2
Major Findings 3
The Context of *Children Achieving* 5
The Progress of Reform 6
    Workplans 8
    Clusters 8
    Standards 9
    The Family Resource Network 9
    Small Learning Communities 10
    Local School Councils 11
    Assessment 11
    Accountability 11
Building Capacity for Instructional Reform 12
    The Teaching and Learning Network 12
    The Office of Best Practices 13
    The Philadelphia Education Fund 13
    School Professional Development Funds 14
    Other External Funding 14
Benefits of *Children Achieving* and Factors Affecting the Pace of Reform in Schools 15
The Baseline for Assessing Future Progress 16
Conclusion 20

THE EVALUATION OF *CHILDREN ACHIEVING*

The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) and its partners, Research for Action and OMG, Inc., have been charged by the Children Achieving Challenge with the evaluation of *Children Achieving*, Philadelphia's comprehensive response to the Annenberg Challenge. Because data collection began in January 1996, this report examines the progress of school reform during the last half of the 1995-96 school year, from January to June 1996. It focuses on the progress of *Children Achieving* in the first six of the projected 22 school clusters. Additionally, 11 schools in the first six clusters were studied intensively.

. Researchers conducted school site visits, reviewed documents produced by the district and interviewed central office staff members, cluster leaders, Teaching and Learning Network (TLN) coordinators, Family Resource Network (FRN) coordinators and Philadelphia Education Fund (PEF) staff members. The evaluation team also designed a teacher survey for administration in the fall of 1996, developed baseline indicators reflecting the experiences of students during the 1994-95 school year and formulated a strategy for collecting baseline information on the location, characteristics and plans for small learning communities (SLCs) in operation during the 1995-96 school year.

All of us [in the small learning community] share the thinking that *Children Achieving* is a new notion of standards, performance and evaluation of students. I believe it will bring us closer together as a small learning community.

— *Philadelphia educator*

CHILDREN ACHIEVING'S THEORY OF ACTION

To assess the progress and effects of a comprehensive reform such as *Children Achieving*, it is essential to understand its "theory of action," that is, the assumptions made about what actions or behaviors will produce the desired effects. Based on the district's 10-point agenda for education reform and statements the superintendent has made, we summarize the theory of action in this way:

> *Given high academic standards and strong incentives to focus their efforts and resources; more control over school resource allocations, organization, policies, and programs; adequate funding and resources; more hands-on leadership and high-quality support; better coordination of resources and programs; schools restructured to support good teaching and encourage improvement of practice; rich professional development of their own choosing; and increased public understanding and support; the teachers and administrators of the Philadelphia schools will develop, adopt or adapt instructional technologies and patterns of behavior that will help all children reach the district's high standards.*

The critical "drivers" in this theory are the standards and incentives embedded in a yet-to-be defined accountability system. Neither of these elements were in place in the 1995-96 school year. The focus of this year's work was to develop standards, put in place the infrastructure that would support reform, establish relationships needed to make the new infrastructure work, begin preparing teachers to use the new standards, and design and win support for an accountability system and incentives. The "drivers" will come into play in the next two years, as the standards and accountability procedures are implemented.

The district's 10-point plan provides direction to educators in the form of standards but offers them no specific prescription for how they could improve teaching and learning. Instead, it proposes to provide opportunities for them to devise their own strategies and support for their implementation. And it proposes a system of rewards and sanctions to encourage improved performance.

The 10 points make me conscious of the need to do all things all the time, to pay attention. To do it halfway is not good enough.

— *Philadelphia educator*

MAJOR FINDINGS

Completing all the important tasks planned for the first year of *Children Achieving*, the School District of Philadelphia made considerable progress, beginning to move its reform agenda from paper to reality in six clusters and 67 schools. By the year's end, the first six clusters were up and running, content standards were drafted in mathematics, reading/language arts, science and the arts, critical pieces of the support infrastructure were operating in the six initial clusters, and the process of changing school organization and governance was under way. Despite serious obstacles, the district earned a solid record of accomplishment in the reform initiative's first year. Participants at all levels reported that the Teaching and Learning Network and the cluster structure, in particular, were working, and that other elements of *Children Achieving* — small learning communities, local school councils and the Family Resource Network — were being put into place.

Based on our analysis of data collected through observations, interviews, and document review, we principally find that:

- ***Children Achieving* was on schedule and gaining momentum.** The basic infrastructure of *Children Achieving* was put in place in the first six clusters. While not all components were operational in 1995-96, they were gearing up according to schedule. Reaction to the cluster system among most participants was positive. Morale was high among cluster staff, though the workload was daunting.

Superintendent Hornbeck gave us the vision, but we have had to create a process.

— *Philadelphia educator*

- **Despite fiscal and political challenges, reform moved forward.** In spite of considerable challenges to *Children Achieving*'s viability — the district's fiscal crisis, union opposition, media attacks and interventions by the Commonwealth Court and the city council — significant districtwide accomplishments emerged. In addition to the new cluster organization, full-day kindergarten was implemented in 67 additional elementary schools across the district. The opening of school was streamlined, and the leveling process occurred more quickly, reducing the loss of instructional time. A new testing program was installed. Content standards in mathematics, reading/language arts, science, and the arts were drafted, reviewed by experts and distributed to all teachers for review.
- **The vision underlying the reform was understood and generally accepted among central office and cluster staff members, but was less well-understood in the schools.** *Children Achieving*'s theory of action was understood and generally accepted among district leadership. But it was less well understood among teachers, many of whom still perceived the reform initiative as a disconnected collection of projects. Some worried the reforms were "pie in the sky" given the fiscal realities, while others felt threatened.
- **Key organizational components of reform were gaining acceptance, but understanding and support varied across schools.** The TLN was gaining acceptance in the first six clusters, although high school staff remained somewhat skeptical. Other components of *Children Achieving*, such as the SLCs and the local school councils, were being put in place, but often were not well-understood by school staff. In particular, SLCs frequently lacked the shared educational philosophy and cohesion that were intended to be their hallmarks. Additional time was required to form and experiment with different models, especially in the elementary schools.
- **Supports for reform were inadequately coordinated and sometimes lacked focus.** A significant amount of funds were invested in professional development, but the use of the funds at the school and cluster levels varied widely and too often was not tied to any coherent educational vision or plan. Additional guidance and standards may be needed. Links between the TLN and other key elements of the teaching and learning support system — the Philadelphia Education Fund and the Office of Best Practices — were weak. School staff members reported receiving information in fragments that failed to link the elements of *Children Achieving* to the overall structure.
- **Standards and accountability topped educators' priority issues.** Content standards and the district's emerging accountability system emerged as foci of school staff members' attention, and many felt threatened by these aspects of *Children Achieving*. Administration of the Stanford Achievement Test 9th

Edition (SAT-9) awakened many educators to the realization that they may have to change their classroom practice. Others felt that the performance standards simply could not be reached, given the conditions under which they were working and the socio-economic circumstances of their students. Clear models of practice and curricular materials linked to the standards are needed to bolster confidence and guide changes in practice.

- **Educators questioned decentralization.** With the exception of professional development decisionmaking, cluster and school staff members saw little progress in decentralizing authority. Some doubted its wisdom. They complained about a lack of budget information and the difficulty of spending money. They worried that local school councils would have no real authority or would misuse such power.

- **Schools' responses to reform priorities were uneven.** Most schools were struggling with one or more of the core reforms — teaching and learning, governance, or family and community involvement — but only three of the 11 schools we examined were effectively addressing all dimensions. At the opposite end of the range, three others were not doing much in any of the key areas covered under *Children Achieving*.

- **Schools that made the most progress in implementing reforms shared a handful of key characteristics.** Such schools had a collective vision based on an instructional approach, experience with sustained efforts to implement changes, an atmosphere of trust and mutual interdependence, and formal structures to support the program and collaborative decisionmaking. In these schools, staff members felt they were moving in a direction that dovetailed with *Children Achieving*. Educators at schools with relatively high capacity for reform saw the initiative as legitimating their efforts. Schools that had previous exposure to reform efforts often already had developed a strong sense of direction for improvement, whereas some other schools were floundering in the absence of clear direction from *Children Achieving*.

I'm a little skeptical about whether it's going to be a bottom-up approach or it's going to be top-down.

— *Philadelphia educator*

THE CONTEXT OF *CHILDREN ACHIEVING*

In October 1994, just two months after the board of education selected David Hornbeck as superintendent, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* published a special report, "A District in Distress," which described and graphically illustrated the desperate situation in the Philadelphia schools:

- Less than half of Philadelphia students entering high school in 1989 graduated four years later;
- Only 15 of the city's 171 public elementary schools scored above the average on nationally normed reading tests;

Society doesn't stop at the school doors. There's one of me and 33 of them ... Family involvement is necessary for children to achieve. Otherwise, they have no reason to.

— *Philadelphia educator*

- Students in only two high schools, both magnet programs, scored above the national average on the SAT;
- Test scores varied directly with poverty levels (at the time of the *Inquirer* report, nearly half of all Philadelphia students came from families receiving public assistance); and
- Exacerbating the situation, Philadelphians had among the lowest per-pupil spending in the area, but had a tax burden twice as high as their neighbors in suburban counties.

The progress of *Children Achieving* must be appraised in the context of the difficult environment within which it is being implemented. The reform agenda has been modified to fit the confines of shrinking federal, state and local education budgets, in addition to desegregation mandates handed down by the Commonwealth Court. State and city political leaders have offered opposition to what some view as an overly expensive enterprise. Philadelphia Federation of Teachers union leaders have characterized the plan as an effort to take away teachers' hard-won rights, impose reforms of dubious value and hold teachers accountable for curing society's ills. And media coverage of the reform has been uneven, sometimes offering support or raising important questions about the viability of the plan, and sometimes fostering public distrust of the system.

THE PROGRESS OF REFORM

Lending definition and direction to *Children Achieving*, major accomplishments of the 1995-96 school year included:

- Completion of seven district workplans for implementing the reform agenda;
- Implementation of a new form of district organization, the cluster;
- Development of content standards to guide design of curriculum and assessment procedures in the schools;
- Creation of new support structures to assist the schools — funding for professional development, the TLN and the FRN;
- Development of new structures within the schools to foster changes in governance and instruction — local school councils and small learning communities;
- Design and initial implementation of a new assessment and accountability system tied to high standards;
- Implementation of full-day kindergarten in all racially isolated elementary schools and early classroom leveling procedures;

- Engagement of community resources in schools via independent community organizing and the recruitment and training of volunteers;
- Changes within the district's central office itself; and
- Attainment of $95 million of the $100 million required to match the Annenberg Challenge grant.

Major Components of *Children Achieving* Implementation Scorecard - 1995-96

***Children Achieving* Elements**	**No Action Taken**	**Interim System in Place/ Development Under Way**	**New System Designed**	**Partial Implementation of New System**	**New System Operational or Task Completed**	**New System Generally Perceived as Effective**	**New System Proved Effective**
District Workplans					✓		
Clusters - 6					✓	✓	
Clusters - 16				✓			
Content Standards I[1]			✓				
Content Standards II[2]		✓					
Opportunity to Learn Standards		✓					
Performance Standards	✓						
Teaching and Learning Network				✓		✓	
Family Resource Network				✓		✓	
Small Learning Communities				✓			
Local School Councils				✓			
Assessment System		✓					
Accountability System		✓					
Public Engagement				✓			

Mathematics, science, the arts and English/language arts
Health, physical education, social studies and world languages

Summarizing progress the district has made in these critical areas, the chart on page 7 indicates that *Children Achieving* is in an early stage of implementation. While much was achieved during 1995-96, several major elements of the reform were only being implemented, designed or negotiated at the end of the year.

> Teachers long in the system are guessing whether the new initiatives are going to be beneficial or just go away in a year or two.
>
> — *Philadelphia educator*

WORKPLANS

Seven workteams assumed responsibility for translating the *Children Achieving* reform agenda into detailed implementation plans based on recommendations by the Children Achieving Task Forces. Each team was led by senior district officials or leaders of partner groups, and its members included representatives from the central office, schools, the PFT and various partner organizations, such as the PEF, the Alliance for Public School Advocates and local universities. The teams met over several months to develop plans for productivity and management, standards and assessment, school-to-career efforts, leadership development, small learning communities, the TLN, the FRN and program evaluation. Following wide review, drafts were approved by the board and the Children Achieving Challenge Oversight Committee.

The workplan process proved to be a mixed blessing. On one hand, it was highly participatory and brought together individuals from in and out of the district who otherwise would have had little opportunity to discuss policy. On the other hand, the process was slow and not well-understood by those not participating. In the main, most of those who participated found it to be a worthwhile process.

CLUSTERS

Six clusters began operations in the 1995-96 school year. They included 67 schools with a total enrollment of about 60,000 students. The intent was to provide leadership and support for reform in a small group of K-12 schools, and to move decisionmaking closer to the schools, and thereby to enhance both the quality of decisions and the motivation of school staff members. Each cluster had a cluster leader, one secretary, an administrative assistant, a teaching and learning coordinator, between four and six teaching and learning facilitators, a family resource coordinator and between two and four instructional support teachers.

Overall, the six clusters made considerable progress. All six initiated some clusterwide improvement efforts, found external partners to assist them and persuaded and helped the schools to implement organizational and governance changes associated with *Children Achieving*. School participants noted the benefits of increased communication and improved articulation across schools at various grade levels. They also saw benefits of pooling resources for purchasing curriculum and consultant services throughout the cluster.

The cluster leaders coped with a number of problems. Foremost among them has been overcoming principals' and teachers' resistance and skepticism about the initiative's staying power, given funding problems. Cluster leaders made some headway with teachers, and they gained the respect of most principals with whom we spoke. While cluster leaders reported good communication and support from the Office of Schools, they complained that budget and purchasing procedures remained too slow and cumbersome. Cluster leaders also felt that artificial deadlines set by the central office forced schools to implement SLCs and local school councils before they were ready.

The next 16 clusters coming on line in 1996-97 face major challenges. They will find fewer resources than the original six, with at least one less staff member and smaller operational budgets. They also may find it harder to raise external funds due to competition with the other clusters.

How can I build the perfect world? You can't, but you can try. That's what the Family Resource Network is out there doing — trying to build the perfect marriage of community, school, parents, students and senior citizens. [We're trying to] create public ownership of schools.

— Philadelphia educator

STANDARDS

Seven writing teams — composed of parents, teachers, administrators and others — drafted standards in mathematics, science, the arts and English/language arts in the fall and winter, then revised them in the spring. The standards were submitted to expert reviewers in the late spring, reviewed by broad-based teams of teachers, administrators and parents, and finally revised in-house. Revised drafts were distributed to all teachers at the end of the school year. Current plans call for the standards to be adopted by the board of education in September and implemented by teachers in the 1996-97 school year. Standards in the remaining subjects — health and physical education, social studies and world languages — will be developed over the next year, and cross-cutting competencies, e.g., problem-solving and communication, will be embedded in subject-oriented standards. Opportunity-to-learn standards are to be developed in the fall.

To improve their practice and student performance, teachers need concrete materials, curricular units and models tied to the standards, as well as time to write curricula. They also need a clear understanding of the relationship between standards, curriculum, instruction and assessment. The 11 schools we examined showed wide variation in teachers' awareness of these relationships. All of the schools reported some professional development about standards by the TLN or the Urban Systemic Initiative and Project 2061.

THE FAMILY RESOURCE NETWORK

Asserting that children who lack health care, food or shelter or who otherwise face hardship are unlikely to achieve at high levels, the School District of Philadelphia and its partners included the development of the Family Resource Network in its proposal to the Annenberg Foundation. The network coordinator is expected to act as a bridge between schools and external partners and between schools and the central office. Based at the cluster level, coordinators are charged with enhancing families' access to services and working with school-based student support personnel, including the volunteer coordinator, school nurses and counselors, and other school-based staff with responsibility for community linkage.

> Much of what the Family Resource Network does is intangible ... The FRN is not an office, it is a philosophy, a conceptual holding cell.
>
> — *Philadelphia educator*

The FRN's mission seems clear — to provide more comprehensive services for students and families by using community support systems more effectively — but putting that vision into practice remains a puzzle. Cluster and central office personnel seemed to have similar concepts of the FRN, but school staff still struggled to understand *Children Achieving*'s student support initiative. When the FRN was developed, FRN staff complained, there was little communication or consultation with school-based staff. While nurses, counselors and psychologists were considered key elements of the FRN, communication between the central office and the school level was so limited that many were confused about the roles of the network and FRN coordinators.

Nevertheless, most of the schools in our sample took advantage of FRN resources. While two schools — a high school and an elementary school — found the FRN and its resources largely invisible, the other nine used network funds for three main purposes: trips or programs for students, programs for parents and buying more professional staffing for community-school teams.

SMALL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The district defines a small learning community as a collection of teachers and less than 400 students who spend most of their time together, providing a close relationship that spans more than one year. The rationale is that such intimate educational environments build collegiality among staff members, motivate teachers to improve their practice, strengthen bonds between teachers and students and, consequently, motivate students to improve performance.

In the 234 schools that responded to our survey of principals, 410 SLCs had been established. However, the names of some of the nominated programs (i.e., "First Grade," "Title I Program") suggest that they may not all be the type of SLCs envisioned by the school district. While most staff members in the schools we visited understood some basic features of SLCs, they sometimes displayed confusion over what these structures might look like in practice. The four elementary schools visited by the evaluation team were in the exploratory stage with SLCs. Unlike the elementary schools, staff members in the four middle schools had some familiarity with SLCs through their experience with "houses." All four middle schools had house structures in place. And high schools, which traditionally have had the most experience in this area of reform, had SLCs in operation in all three cases studied.

LOCAL SCHOOL COUNCILS

The central office has issued guidelines for the composition of local school councils, another key component of the *Children Achieving* reform. Each council must be composed of the principal, a majority of teachers selected through a process determined by the PFT building committee, and parents selected under the supervision of the Home and School Association. Middle schools and high schools must include two students on the council. To be an official council, 35 percent of the parents must vote in the election. Until that target is achieved, a council has interim status. Councils are responsible for consulting with the school community and developing plans for public engagement; developing disciplinary and other schoolwide policies, such as security, maintenance, facilities operation and transportation; reviewing school improvement plans and budgets; making recommendations about teaching and learning; and reporting to the public.

The 67 schools in the first six clusters were expected to hold council elections and have a functioning council by the end of the school year. Only 12 schools met the 35 percent voting target; the remainder created interim councils. Most cluster leaders felt that the change to local decisionmaking was being rushed and that neither schools or parents understood what was expected.

It's a shared decision-making situation. We sit down together and decide what is good for our school. No one is higher than anyone else on this council; majority rules.

— *Philadelphia educator*

ASSESSMENT

A new assessment system, including portfolios and performance-based assessments, is expected to provide multiple measures of the district's progress toward new standards. In 1995-96, these performance measures had not yet been defined and the only districtwide measure was the SAT-9 in reading, mathematics and science, which was administered in grades two, four, six, eight and 11. The SAT-9 also was administered to the 67 schools in the first six clusters in 1994-95. Some schools were exploring or piloting other measures, such as performance tasks, portfolios, exhibitions and student work sampling.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The district's top management took its first real step toward a new accountability system in 1995-96. The superintendent and board of education adopted 30 performance goals for the year and linked 1996-97 pay increases of all central office administrators and cluster leaders to the achievement of the goals. The superintendent will report to the board on their achievement in September 1996.

Superintendent Hornbeck proposed to extend this pay-for-performance approach to teachers and principals in the coming years. Student performance targets would be defined for 1996-97 for each school using the SAT-9 along with other performance indicators, such as attendance. The 1995-96 data would provide the baseline for schools in all 22 clusters. Schools would have two years to reach their targets, and monetary incentives would be tied to their performance. Poor performance would lead to intensive assistance or sanctions, such as limited access to pay increases or reconstitution of schools. This system was a topic of negotiations with the PFT as this report was being drafted.

There's no more one-word answers with these tests ... Teachers will have to change the way they teach to get kids ready for this kind of test.

— *Philadelphia educator*

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR INSTRUCTIONAL REFORM

To foster and support professional development, the district and its partners have created several new organizations — two within the district and one outside. The Teaching and Learning Network and the Office of Best Practices serve as the primary district vehicles for supporting school staff members' efforts to implement new standards and SLCs, develop or adopt curricula and improve teaching practice. The new external partner, the Philadelphia Education Fund, is the product of a merger of two highly regarded school reform organizations, the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative and PATHS/PRISM.

The district and the Challenge also have provided substantial financial support for professional development in the six clusters. Over $3.7 million went directly to the schools in the first six clusters to support 10 days of professional development for school staff.[3] An additional $1.7 million in Title I funds was available for professional development in 46 eligible cluster schools. Cluster leaders provided the schools with an additional $384,000 for professional development from their budgets. A federal mathematics, science and technology grant trained and supported lead teachers in mathematics and science in the schools studied. And some schools received additional support from the PEF through the Students at the Center and Library Power projects.

THE TEACHING AND LEARNING NETWORK

The TLN — the district's primary mechanism for improving curriculum and instruction, fostering school improvement initiatives and supporting instructional change — was launched in the spring of 1995 to provide support and staff development activities to help the first six clusters meet the challenges of *Children Achieving*. In 1995-96, the network consisted of six coordinators — one in each cluster — and 27 full-time facilitators, e.g., master teachers — between four and six in each cluster. Outside of this core group, but part of the TLN, were support staff members stationed in schools, such as reading teachers, department heads, SLC coordinators, and instructional support teachers.

Working with TLN staff, each school developed an action plan that identified areas requiring assistance. Given the district's emphasis on creating SLCs and standards development, network coordinators indicated that much of their work focused on these areas in this first year.

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[3] The financial information reported here is taken from Office of Schools and Office of Standards, Equity, and Student Services. *Professional Development Presentation* [illegible] May 30, 1996.

The biggest challenge facing the TLN this year was gaining acceptance in schools. Network staff members indicated that many teachers were initially resistant and questioned how the TLN staff could possibly help them. However, according to a recent survey by the Office of Accountability and Assessment, this problem has been largely overcome. Of the 186 teachers interviewed in cluster schools, 136 reported being served by the TLN. Nearly 90 percent of teachers served by the TLN reported that they found services either "helpful" or "very helpful." Although most school staff members valued the network, we also found schools in which staff members were skeptical about the capacity of the TLN coordinator or facilitators to help them. In one reform-oriented school with exceptionally strong local teacher leadership and an ongoing staff development program, for example, few school-level participants saw the TLN as valuable, and, indeed, its influence was not visible in the school.

> [Standards] find ways other than paper and pencil to find out what children are actually learning. *Children Achieving* has supplied computers, they instituted the Stanford 9 exam. Once I saw it, I had to reevaluate what I did in my own class.
>
> *— Philadelphia educator*

THE OFFICE OF BEST PRACTICES

The mission of the Office of Best Practices, created in the spring of 1995, is to help schools and SLCs link school plans, purchases and professional development with the district's new academic standards and instruction and assessment practices. The ultimate goals are for the office to both act as a "filter" for what comes into the school district and to provide models of exemplary practice tied directly to evidence of improved student achievement.

The office is developing a database of promising work occurring in the district, along with information on effective practices from across the nation. Teachers will be able to access the information via the Internet. The system already is on-line, and by the start of the 1996-97 school year every teacher in the district should have access. In addition, the office is disseminating information via Effective Practice Fairs.

Although the Office of Best Practices has already begun to disseminate information, district officials admit that they are not yet ready to identify what constitutes "blue ribbon" practice. Many teachers and administrators expressed skepticism about the possibility of demonstrating the relative effectiveness of one practice over another, given the number of mitigating circumstances in classrooms.

THE PHILADELPHIA EDUCATION FUND

The Philadelphia Education Fund, a nonprofit technical assistance group, has worked closely with the district to design and implement *Children Achieving*. It has played a leadership role in developing the Standards and Assessment Workplan and the Teaching and Learning Workplan. PEF staff members have collaborated closely with the Office of Standards, Equity and Student Services to manage development of content standards, a process which involved district staff, administrators, teachers and parents. While draft content standards were completed, the PEF's work slowed in April following a Commonwealth Court order forbidding the district to delegate such tasks to the PEF. After the district appealed this order, collaboration between the district and the PEF continued. The Collaboration has been successful in most respects, but coordination among the PEF, the TLN and clusters remains inadequate.

The PEF's funding and its role in the development of standards have generated some controversy. The media have raised questions about the PEF's role and how funds are used for *Children Achieving*. Such controversies have hampered the PEF's ability to provide the technical assistance it was expected to provide.

Children Achieving is about schools doing all they can do to provide services so that students can achieve. The root strategy is putting decisionmaking at the school level, providing professional development so teachers adapt to students, and increasing the use of technology and the involvement of the parents.

— *Philadelphia educator*

SCHOOL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDS

Each of the schools in five of the six clusters received about $64 per child in discretionary funds for professional development. The exception was Strawberry Mansion, where the amount allocated to the schools ranged from $53 to about $100 per child. In addition, 46 of the 67 schools received Title I funds that could be used for professional development.

While there was wide variation in the ways schools used these funds, most schools emphasized the use of standards, standards-based instruction, and preparing their students for the SAT-9. Mathematics, reading, writing and science received heavy attention, as did the use of alternative assessment procedures. Almost all schools provided some training in the use of technology. And some schools provided professional development geared toward implementing SLCs and school councils. The capacity of schools to focus their professional development efforts varied; those with clear instructional philosophies appeared to be well-focused, while others had fragmented or piecemeal approaches.

OTHER EXTERNAL FUNDING

In addition to the district support for professional development, the clusters and their schools were the recipients of other external assistance, including resources from the School-to-Work program, the National Science Foundation's Urban Systemic Initiative, the William Penn Foundation, the IBM Foundation, the DeWitt Wallace-Readers' Digest Fund's Library Power program and the DeWitt Wallace Foundation's Students at the Center initiative.

BENEFITS OF *CHILDREN ACHIEVING* AND FACTORS AFFECTING THE PACE OF REFORM IN SCHOOLS

School staff members generally identified three broad elements of *Children Achieving* that were supporting school improvement: the cluster structure, professional development and other new resources, and new district values stimulating reform. The clusters were widely perceived as facilitating K-12 articulation, encouraging pooling of resources, creating a sense of unity among schools, reaching out to community members and providing vital support for after-school programs. The Teaching and Learning Network, the Family Resource Network and professional development opportunities were among the most highly regarded. And several other major elements — local school councils, assessment reform and shared decisionmaking regarding professional development funds — contributed to teachers' sense of legitimacy and shared values.

> The role of the district is to take advantage of economies of scale and leverage, and to make the necessary policy changes. Schools have to tell us what the barriers are, and then we create the policies that will eliminate those barriers.
>
> — *Philadelphia educator*

Schools that seemed to be making the most progress at improving teaching and learning shared four common features. We hypothesize that these features are key building blocks for developing a school's capacity for reform and ability to benefit from changes engendered by *Children Achieving*.

Coherent vision of school goals and program direction — The most important characteristic of schools making progress was a shared commitment by staff and administration to a model of instruction or a set of pedagogical principles. These shared understandings provided the basis for focused professional development, the development of small learning communities and collective efforts to improve practice.

Sustained experience with improvement — Some schools in our sample had experience with learning to use new approaches and working with partners, such as PATHS/PRISM, the Urban Mathematics Collaborative, the K-12 Math/Science Leadership Congress or the Penn Literacy Program. A few also had participated in earlier efforts to decentralize authority to the school level and had explored or actually had established a governance council that included teachers and parents along with the principal. At these sites, staff members appeared more willing to take risks and try new approaches because they had experienced success in the past and because they had developed norms of mutual support.

An atmosphere of trust and mutual interdependence among all school community members — In some schools, most teachers and staff members supported the school's direction. While not all teachers in the school were at the same level of proficiency or comfort with new approaches, there was a willingness to take coaching from colleagues. Community members and parents often were viewed as offering resources and supports in such schools.

Infrastructure to support the program and decisionmaking — Several schools we visited organized time in the school day or during the summer for planning and decisionmaking meetings. Most of these schools already had in place some structure for staff participation in decisionmaking and, in one case, parents also helped make decisions.

In past reform movements, you felt you were going to do it in spite of the district. Now we are looked at as being ahead. We feel support for what we have been doing.

— *Philadelphia educator*

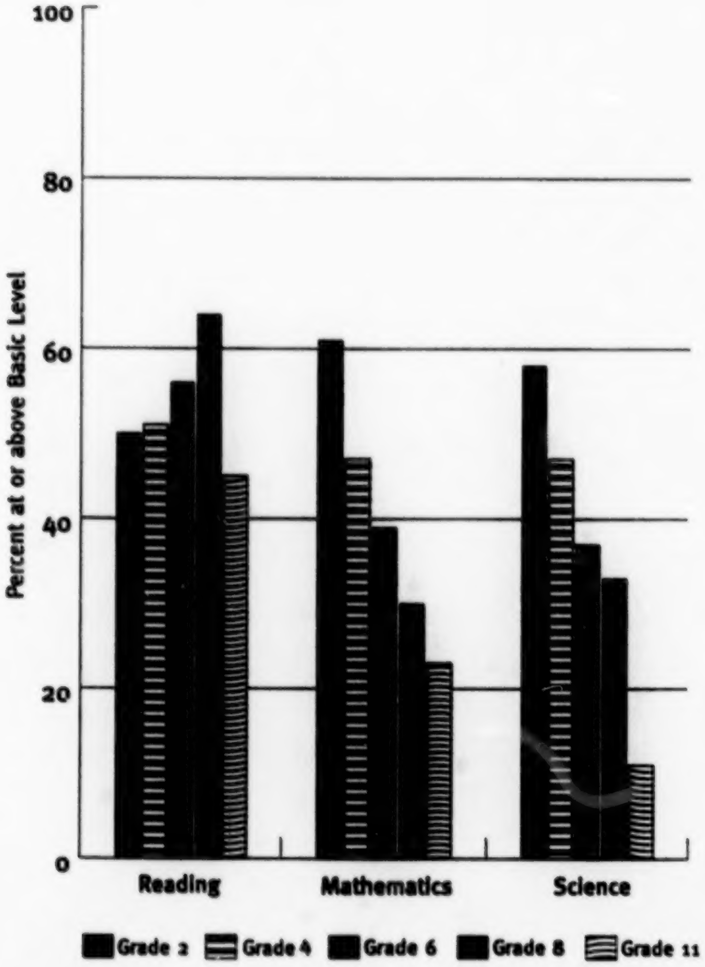
THE BASELINE FOR ASSESSING FUTURE PROGRESS

In the spring of 1996, the district administered the Stanford Achievement Test 9th Edition to all students in grades two, four, six, eight and 11. Student performance is categorized into four performance levels — below basic, basic, proficient and advanced. The district's long-term goal is to have 95 percent of its students score at or above the proficient level in all subjects. Figure 1 shows that only half of Philadelphia students scored at the basic level or above in reading in the first districtwide administration of the SAT-9, with the exception of grade 11, where the scores were lower. In mathematics and science, the results are even poorer. Only in grade two did bare majorities of students test at or above basic performance levels. Those students achieving the target level of proficiency in any subject ranged from 2 percent in 11th-grade science to a high of only 22 percent in eighth-grade reading.

These results reflect the sobering reality that Philadelphia students are not mastering the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in later life. While the standards for performance on SAT-9 are more rigorous than for previous tests used in the district, these results indicate that the district's staff and its students have a substantial amount of work to do to meet the high expectations called for by *Children Achieving*.

FIGURE 1

Performance Levels in Key Subjects: Results of SAT-9 Testing (1995-96)



[*Children Achieving*] focused us and gave us a goal.

— *Philadelphia educator*

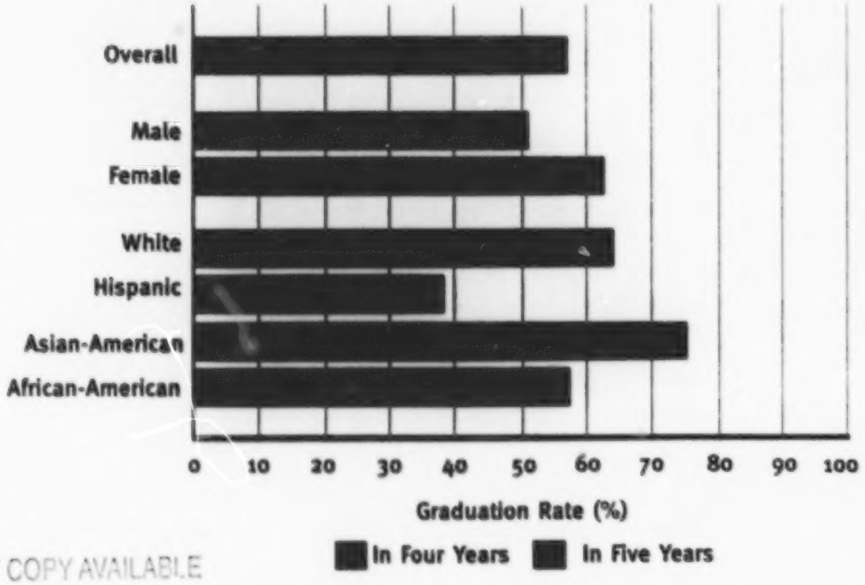
Figure 2 presents the four- and five-year graduation rates of students from district high schools. Overall, just over half of entering ninth-graders graduated in four years. A relatively small set of additional students graduated in five years. Approximately three in 10 students dropped out of school during the five years and another 13 percent remained enrolled five years after entering ninth grade.

There were marked differences in graduation rates among groups of students served by the district. Considering five-year graduation rates, females graduated at a rate 11 percentage points higher than males; only about half (51.2 percent) of male ninth-grade students graduate within five years.

> The new testing program requires writing and problem-solving. So we must change what we do for kids to be successful on those tests.
>
> — *Philadelphia educator*

FIGURE 2

Graduation Rates of Students Entering Grade Nine in September 1990



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Asian-American students graduated at a rate higher than 75 percent, followed by white students whose graduation rate was about 68 percent. African American graduation rates were only 56 percent but were substantially greater than those of Hispanic students, among whom fewer than two in five (38.4 percent) graduated in five years. Strikingly, only 31 percent of male Hispanic students graduated within five years. The patterns are comparable to those in other urban districts, but the overall low graduation rates indicate the serious challenges that face Philadelphia.

While these findings are somewhat better than those reported from earlier comparable studies, they still indicate the substantial inability of schools to prepare students and graduate them successfully. In addition, the results mask to some degree departures of students at earlier grades who never enroll in ninth grade at all. Taken in conjunction with SAT-9 results in 11th grade, these findings indicate that the prospects of entering ninth-grade students completing high school and being well-prepared for the next phase of their lives are not strong.

These data provide the baseline against which future progress and the success of *Children Achieving* ultimately will be judged. Next year and in subsequent years, the evaluation team will examine the gains made and the factors related to improvements in performance.

Teaching and Learning Network? People are cynical because they're not high school. They see the words like enthusiasm, creativity, child-centered ... but think 'that's for middle school.'

— *Philadelphia educator*

CONCLUSION

The School District of Philadelphia has made important progress in *Children Achieving*'s first year, realizing all the important development and implementation aims set for the period. By the end of the year, the first six clusters had launched operations, standards had been drafted, schools had begun changing organization and governance structures, and a new testing system had been put in place.

Children Achieving cheers you on. You don't feel like you're alone. Now it is the whole district that is behind you.

— *Philadelphia educator*

The district and its partners have undertaken a broad and ambitious reform agenda in a highly turbulent environment. These problems have consumed district leaders' time and energy, sometimes distracting them from the tasks of implementation. The media's coverage of the district's problems must also have strengthened the resistance of those teachers and administrators who object to the reforms, and who hold out hopes that "this too will pass." Perhaps most significantly, fiscal battles have left the district without the resources needed to fully support the reform efforts planned for the 1996-97 school year.

Unfortunately, these problems are likely to continue to plague the district throughout 1996-97. While much has been accomplished so far, the district will have to continue to improve its internal and external communications, coordination of services, and assistance to schools to make further progress. Although challenging, it can be done. With the new organizational structure and the new standards in place districtwide, Philadelphia can continue to move forward.

Children Achieving Challenge Oversight Committee

Children Achieving Challenge Staff

A Word of Thanks

The Children Achieving Challenge
is a program of
Greater Philadelphia First

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